

PRESS RELEASE

Maryland Man Pleads Guilty to Filing More Than \$1 Million in Fraudulent Unemployment Insurance Claims

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Maryland

Used victims' personal identifying info to file fraudulent unemployment claims.

Baltimore, Maryland – Mervyn Fombe Abiko, 35, of Prince George's County, Maryland, pled guilty to federal charges in connection with a scheme to fraudulently obtain more than \$1 million in unemployment benefits.

Kelly O. Hayes, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the plea with Postal Inspector in Charge Damon Wood, U.S. Postal Inspection Service – Washington Division; Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer, National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG); Special Agent in Charge Michael McCarthy, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Baltimore; and Special Agent in Charge Karl Mastantuno, U.S. Department of the Treasury – Office of Inspector General (OIG).

According to his guilty plea, from February 2020 through February 2021, Abiko and co-defendants Martin Tabe and Gladstone Njokem, along with others, conspired to impersonate victims to obtain money by submitting fraudulent unemployment insurance (UI) benefits claims. Abiko and his co-conspirators collected the personally identifiable information (PII), without the victims' knowledge or consent, and shared the PII amongst themselves and with others to facilitate fraudulent activities. The co-conspirators then used the victims' PII to submit fraudulent applications for UI benefits in Maryland, Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Tennessee, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

Authorities traced at least \$1,313,325 in UI benefits to Abiko's conspiracy in which co-conspirators fraudulently applied for UI benefits using the names and PII of more than

183 victims. Law enforcement connected the dots of the scheme based on common IP addresses, mailing addresses and/or email addresses used for the fraudulent UI claims.

Co-defendants Martin Tabe, 35, of Bowie, Maryland, and Sylvester Atekwane, 34, of Hyattsville, Maryland, previously pleaded guilty to their roles in the fraud scheme.

Additionally, co-defendant Gladstone Njokem, 37, of Hyattsville, Maryland, pled guilty and was sentenced by the Honorable Richard D. Bennett on October 13, 2023, to 54 months in connection with the conspiracy.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

U.S. Attorney Hayes commended the USPIS, DOL-OIG, HSI, and Treasury-OIG for their work in the investigation. Additionally, Ms. Hayes recognized the Prince George's County Police Department, the Baltimore County Police Department, and the Maryland Department of Labor for their assistance. She also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean R. Delaney who is prosecuting the federal case.

For more information about the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to help the community, please visit www.justice.gov/usao-md and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>.

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