

Press Release

## Newport News woman sentenced to over seven years in prison for COVID era unemployment insurance fraud scheme

Friday, May 8, 2026

### **For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – A Newport News woman was sentenced today to seven years and four months in prison for conspiracy to commit mail fraud and aggravated identity theft involving the filing of unemployment insurance (UI) claims in the names of prison inmates and others.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government expanded and extended UI benefits for impacted workers. The Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) administers unemployment compensation in Virginia.

According to court documents, from May 2020 to October 2021, Lakeia Simone Grant, aka Lakeia Shepperd, Lakeia Williams, Lakeia Miles, or Chris Lover, 40, schemed to defraud the expanded unemployment eligibility by using the personal identifying information or prison inmates and others to file fraudulent claims for UI benefits, falsely attesting that the beneficiaries were ready, willing, and able to work and that they lost their jobs due to COVID-19.

Grant filed fraudulent claims with VEC for inmates and coordinated to obtain, transfer, and expend proceeds. Grant conspired with inmate recruiters to obtain the personally identifying information of inmates to file such claims. She also filed fraudulent UI claims for non-inmates either by using stolen personally identifying information or in exchange for a percentage of money obtained by the applicants.

Grant and her co-conspirators filed approximately 38 successful UI claims in the names and information of inmates, resulting in payments totaling approximately \$546,576 in benefits. VEC was able to recover some of the funds, resulting in an actual loss to VEC of approximately \$480,392.76. Grant and her co-conspirators also applied for at least four successful UI claims for non-inmates resulting in an additional fraud loss of approximately \$107,670.

Grant is a five-time convicted felon. In November 2005, Grant was convicted of obstruction of justice and petit larceny in Newport News Circuit Court after she was caught shoplifting, attempted to hit the loss prevention officer, and threatened to burn down the business and blow it up. In July 2008, Grant was convicted of unlawful wounding for attacking a victim at a night club. Grant was convicted in April 2010 and again in October 2014 in Chesterfield Circuit Court for conspiring to obtain money by false pretense and obtaining money by false pretense. In April 2019, she was convicted for conspiring to commit financial card fraud in Wake County District Court in Raleigh, North Carolina. In December 2019, she was convicted for failing to return a rental car from Enterprise.

The FBI's Norfolk Field Office; U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; and Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General investigated this case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mack Coleman prosecuted the case.

On April 7, the Department of Justice announced the creation of the National Fraud Enforcement Division. The core mission of the Fraud Division is to zealously investigate and prosecute those who steal or fraudulently misuse taxpayer dollars. Department of Justice efforts to combat fraud support President Trump's Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, a whole-of-government effort chaired by Vice President J.D. Vance to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse within Federal benefit programs.

Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case No. 4:24-cr-80.

## **Contact**

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