

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Washington

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nigerian national indicted for conspiracy, wire fraud and aggravated identity theft for fraud on Employment Security benefits

Defendant detained on criminal complaint in New York now facing additional charges handed up by federal grand jury

Seattle – A Nigerian citizen arrested May 14, 2021 at JFK Airport in New York, is now indicted for conspiracy, wire fraud and aggravated identity theft for his scheme to steal over \$350,000 in unemployment benefits from the Washington State Employment Security Department, announced Acting U.S. Attorney Tessa M. Gorman. Abidemi Rufai, aka Sandy Tang, 42, of Lekki, Nigeria, remains detained at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, New York. Prosecutors have asked U.S. District Judge Benjamin Settle to order Rufai detained and transported to the Western District of Washington for arraignment on the indictment.

Rufai is now charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, nine counts of wire fraud and five counts of aggravated identity theft.

The indictment alleges that Rufai used the stolen identities of more than 100 Washington residents to file fraudulent claims with ESD for pandemic-related unemployment benefits. Rufai also filed fraudulent unemployment claims with Hawaii, Wyoming, Massachusetts, Montana, New York, and Pennsylvania. Rufai used variations of a single e-mail address in a manner intended to evade automatic detection by fraud systems. By using this practice, Rufai made it appear that each claim was connected with a different email account.

Rufai caused the fraud proceeds to be paid out to online payment accounts such as 'Green Dot' accounts, or wired to bank accounts controlled by "money mules." Some of the proceeds were then mailed to the Jamaica, New York address of Rufai's brother. Rufai was residing at his brother's home during part of the period of the fraud. Law enforcement determined more than \$288,000 was deposited into an American bank account controlled by Rufai between March and August 2020.

Conspiracy to commit wire fraud and wire fraud are punishable by up to thirty years in prison when the offense relates to benefits paid in connection with a presidentially-declared disaster or emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Aggravated identity theft is punishable by a mandatory minimum two year sentence to run consecutive to any sentence imposed on the other counts of conviction.

The charges contained in the indictment are only allegations. A person is presumed innocent unless and until he or she is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

This case was investigated by the FBI, with assistance from the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG). The fraud on ESD is being investigated cooperatively by the FBI, DOL-OIG, Social Security Office of Inspector General, U.S. Secret Service, the United States Postal Inspection Service, and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations. The Washington Employment Security Department is cooperating in the investigation.

The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Seth Wilkinson, Cindy Chang, and Benjamin Diggs of the Western District of Washington, and Trial Attorney Jane Lee of DOJ's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section (CCIPS).

[rufai_indictment.pdf](#)

Attachment(s):

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Contact:

Press contact for the U.S. Attorney's Office is Communications Director Emily Langlie at (206) 553-4110 or Emily.Langlie@usdoj.gov.