

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Northern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, July 7, 2022

**State Prisoners Sentenced to Federal Prison for Unemployment
Insurance Fraud**

Long Island Woman Pleads Guilty to Participating in the Prisoners' Scheme

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Reginald Thornton, age 29, and Lord Paulin, age 41, were sentenced today to federal terms of imprisonment for defrauding pandemic-related unemployment insurance programs while they were serving state prison terms at the Bare Hill Correctional Facility in Malone, New York. Additionally, Rhasha Wright, age 30, of Roosevelt, New York, pled guilty today to conspiring with Thornton and Paulin as part of the fraud scheme.

The announcement was made by United States Attorney Carla B. Freedman; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge, New York Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (USDOL-OIG); Matthew Scarpino, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Buffalo Field Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); Ketty Larco-Ward, Inspector in Charge of the Boston Division of the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS); Anthony J. Annucci, Acting Commissioner of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (NYSDOCCS); and Roberta Reardon, Commissioner of the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL).

Thornton and Paulin previously [pled guilty](#) to federal charges for their respective roles in the fraud scheme. Chief United States District Judge Glenn T. Suddaby sentenced Thornton to 51 months in federal prison and imposed a 2-year term of supervised release to follow the term of incarceration. Chief Judge Suddaby sentenced Paulin to a 19-month prison term and imposed a 2-year term of supervised release. Thornton and Paulin will begin their federal prison terms after their respective New York State terms of incarceration end.

In her plea to conspiracy to commit mail fraud and aggravated identity theft charges, Wright admitted to submitting false unemployment insurance claims to NYSDOL in Paulin's name and in the name of another Bare Hill prisoner. Prisoners were not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits.

Wright agreed to pay restitution in the amount of \$11,696 to the State of New York.

Wright's mail fraud conviction carries a maximum term of 20 years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to 3 years. The aggravated identity theft conviction carries a mandatory term of 2 years in prison, to be imposed consecutively to any other term of imprisonment. Wright is scheduled to be sentenced on November 3, 2022 by Chief Judge Suddaby. A defendant's sentence is imposed by a judge based on the particular statute the defendant is charged with violating, the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, and other factors.

The case was investigated by USDOL-OIG, HSI, USPIS, and the Offices of Special Investigations of NYSDOCCS and NYSDOL. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys John T. Chisholm and Joshua R. Rosenthal.

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, please 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>.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus

Financial Fraud

Identity Theft

Component(s):

[USAO - New York, Northern](#)