

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Michigan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 18, 2022

Two Defendants Sentenced in Unemployment Fraud Scheme

DETROIT - Two defendants were sentenced yesterday for their role in an unemployment insurance benefit fraud scheme, announced United States Attorney Dawn N. Ison.

Joining in the announcement were Special Agent-in-Charge James A. Tarasca, Federal Bureau of Investigation; and Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge, Chicago Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

Mitchacole Johnson, 45, of Shelby Township, received a sentence of 3 years in federal prison and Larry Witherspoon, 46, of Harper Woods received a sentence of 4 years in federal prison. Both pleaded guilty to charges of wire fraud and were sentenced by United States District Judge Gershwin Drain.

"These defendants exploited the current pandemic to defraud the State of Michigan and United States for their own personal gain. My office is committed to prosecuting any person who used the Covid-19 crisis to inflict more harm on the people of Michigan," stated U.S. Attorney Dawn N. Ison.

"Both Defendants manipulated the unemployment insurance system and stole taxpayer dollars for their own personal benefit," said James A. Tarasca, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Detroit Division. "The FBI is proud to work with our law enforcement partners to protect our country's vital federal assistance programs intended for out of work Americans."

According to court records, Johnson and Witherspoon are responsible for filing at least 66 claims for fraudulent unemployment insurance benefits in at least 4 states, including Michigan. Their illegal activity caused actual losses of over \$1.3 million and attempted losses of nearly \$3.5 million. Johnson filed a number of claims in her own name, while Witherspoon filed multiple claims in the names of people who had names similar to his own, such as "Lawrence Witherspoon." Both Johnson and Witherspoon filed their claims using other people's Social Security Numbers and had the benefits deposited into a variety of bank accounts, some connected to pre-paid debit cards.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Ryan A. Particka. The investigation was conducted jointly by agents from the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Topic(s):
Coronavirus

Component(s):
[USAO - Michigan, Eastern](#)

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