

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Eastern District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Two Virginia Inmates Plead Guilty to Pandemic Unemployment Benefits Scheme

NORFOLK, Va. – Two men pleaded guilty today to fraudulently obtaining benefits made available as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to court documents, from approximately June 2020 through in or around March 2021, Mark Hilliard, 36, and Elvon George, 33, who were inmates at Greensville Correctional Center during the fraud, collected the personally identifiable information (PII) of their fellow inmates. They then provided the PII to two outside facilitators to file fraudulent unemployment insurance claims. To alleviate financial hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 Congress and the Virginia Employment Commission (“VEC”) expanded unemployment benefits by increasing benefit payments and by making them available to gig workers, the self-employed, and others whose employment status the VEC could not easily verify. The defendants exploited these changes to obtain over \$220,000 in fraudulent unemployment benefits by making numerous false statements in the inmate unemployment applications.

Hilliard pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit fraud in connection with major disaster benefits and is scheduled to be sentenced on April 19, 2022. George also pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit fraud in connection with major disaster benefits and is scheduled to be sentenced on March 31, 2022. Hilliard and George each face a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after taking into account the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Jessica D. Aber, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; Derek Pickle, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Washington, DC Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; and Joseph V. Cuffari, Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security, made the announcement after U.S. District Judge Roderick C. Young accepted the plea.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Rebecca Gantt is prosecuting the case.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. 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. 2:21-cr-111.

Topic(s):
Coronavirus
Financial Fraud

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

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