

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, November 23, 2021

8 Civilian Employees of the Philadelphia Police Department Indicted on Theft and Fraud Charges For Collecting Pandemic Unemployment Assistance

PHILADELPHIA – United States Attorney Jennifer Arbittier Williams announced that the following defendants were charged with fraudulently obtaining emergency unemployment benefits related to COVID-19. Each of the following defendants was charged with one count of mail or wire fraud and one count of theft of government funds for obtaining Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) funds while working for the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) and also collecting his or her City paycheck:

Shannon Reynolds, age 25, of Philadelphia, PA; Najah Harrell, age 32, of Philadelphia, PA; Korey Kinard, age 29, of Philadelphia, PA; Keely Maude, age 23, of Philadelphia, PA; Tashika White, age 50, of Cheltenham, PA; Paulette Johnson, age 55, of Philadelphia, PA; Monica Pelzer, age 45, of Philadelphia, PA; and Yarelis Feliciano, age 28, Philadelphia, PA.

Seven of the eight defendants are employed as radio dispatchers for the PPD: Reynolds, Harrell, Kinard, Maude, White, Pelzer and Feliciano. The eighth defendant, Johnson is employed as a clerk for the PPD. Each defendant is charged in a separate Indictment with the two counts noted above.

On March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was signed into law. The CARES Act created the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, which provides unemployment benefits to individuals not eligible for regular unemployment compensation or extended unemployment benefits, including individuals, families, and businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligibility to receive weekly PUA benefits is predicated on an applicant's unemployment for reasons related to the pandemic, and it requires that the applicant was able to work each day and, if offered a job, would have been able to accept it. Once an applicant is approved to receive benefits, the applicant is required to submit weekly certifications indicating that he or she: was ready, willing and able to work each day; was seeking full time employment; did not refuse any job offers or referrals; and had reported any employment during the week and the gross pay or other payments received.

Each of the defendants is alleged to have submitted weekly certifications stating that they were not employed and were ready, willing, and able to work each day. The Indictments charge that these statements were false because each defendant was employed at the time by PPD. According to the Indictments, as part of the weekly certifications, each defendant also certified that he or she was not earning any wages or grossly unreported true wages to secure eligibility. However, these statements are also allegedly false according to PPD payroll records. As a result of these false statements, each defendant received PUA funds for multiple weeks in which he or she also collected his or her PPD salary.

“Pandemic Unemployment Assistance funds are intended to help Americans who are not working or who have experienced dramatically reduced working hours due to the pandemic, not people who are already gainfully employed,” said U.S. Attorney Williams. “Thieves who attempt to take these funds are taking advantage of others’ misfortune – ripping them off while also ripping off all taxpayers who

fund the program. As alleged, these eight defendants fraudulently obtained funds that could have helped struggling individuals.”

These cases were investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, and the Philadelphia Police Department with assistance from the Pennsylvania Department of Industry and Labor. These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Timothy Lanni.

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 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):
Financial Fraud

Component(s):
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Contact:
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY’S OFFICE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA
615 Chestnut Street, Suite 1250
Philadelphia, PA 19106

JENNIFER CRANDALL
Media Contact
215-861-8300

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