

PRESS RELEASE

Fifteen People Sentenced For Defrauding Unemployment Insurance Agencies During Covid-19 Pandemic

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Michigan

DETROIT – A federal judge sentenced Detroit resident James Mayfield today to 2 years and 6 months in prison for his role in a scheme to defraud state unemployment insurance agencies during the Covid-19 pandemic, United States Attorney Dawn N. Ison announced. Mayfield is the last of 15 defendants to be sentenced for their roles in related unemployment insurance schemes that were carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ison was joined in the announcement by Department of Labor – Office of the Inspector General (DOL-OIG) Special Agent-in-Charge of the Great Lakes Region, Irene Lindow, Special Agent in Charge Cheyvoryea Gibson of the Detroit Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Director Julia Dale, Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency.

According to court records, between February 1, 2020, and January 26, 2021, Sharodney Harrison devised schemes to defraud several states and the federal government by filing fraudulent unemployment insurance claims using other people's personal identifiable information without their knowledge or consent. Harrison and his co-conspirators used various means to further their schemes. Five of the co-conspirators traveled to California between August and September 2020 and used California mailing addresses, including their AirBnB address, to commit unemployment insurance fraud. The schemes tied to Harrison resulted in the filing of nearly 600 fraudulent unemployment insurance claims in 19 states that resulted in a loss of \$2,020,851 to state unemployment insurance

agencies. If all the fraudulent claims had been approved, the resulting loss would have been \$6,920,388.

The investigation into Harrison started after the FBI and DOL-OIG began investigating more than one hundred unemployment insurance claims that were filed with the State of Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency from two IP addresses registered to homes in Detroit. As a result of this investigation, 9 individuals were charged together in one case with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and/or aggravated identity theft. All have pleaded guilty and have been sentenced as follows:

- Sharodney Harrison – Sentenced to 60 months in prison
- Seandrea Crawford – Sentenced to 30 months in prison
- Sharrell Harrison – Sentenced to 42 months in prison
- Sha-Ron Harrison – Sentenced to 46 months in prison
- Sharease Harrison – Sentenced to 26 months in prison
- Edward Taylor – Sentenced to 54 months in prison
- James Mayfield – Sentenced to 30 months in prison
- Frank Jennings – Sentenced to 24 months in prison
- Sharonda Griffin – Sentenced to 26 months in prison

As a result of this investigation, 6 people were charged in separate cases with conspiracy to commit wire fraud or wire fraud. All have pleaded guilty and have been sentenced. As part of their sentences, the defendants were also ordered to pay a total of over \$2 million in restitution to the victims of their fraud.

"We continue to investigate and prosecute those who took advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic to enrich themselves at the expense of taxpayers, while ignoring the effect on those whose identities they stole," U.S. Attorney Dawn Ison said.

"Sharodney Harrison conspired with a dozen individuals, including James Mayfield, to defraud 19 state workforce agencies of more than \$2 million in unemployment insurance (UI) benefits to which Harrison and his co-conspirators were not entitled. Harrison and his co-conspirators filed fraudulent UI claims in the names of identity theft victims, enriching themselves by defrauding a program that was intended to assist struggling American workers during an unprecedented global pandemic," stated Special Agent-in-Charge Irene Lindow, Great Lakes Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General. "We and our law enforcement partners are committed to identifying and prosecuting the criminals who took advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic by fraudulently obtaining pandemic UI benefits using stolen identities."

"Today's sentencing finalizes the FBI's efforts to hold a large-scale network accountable for defrauding unemployment insurance agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Special Agent in Charge Cheyvoryea Gibson of the FBI in Michigan. "Providing false information to gain access fraudulently to relief funds is a theft of taxpayer money. The FBI remains committed to working with our network of law enforcement partners to investigate and hold those accountable who seek to profit personally and defraud government assistance programs."

"The Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency is proud of its role in helping to identify this network of criminals who were brazen enough to steal from taxpayers across the country," UIA Director Julia Dale said. "Whether a crime is committed in Michigan or also includes programs in other states, our staff works closely with state and federal law enforcement to refer cases for investigation, stop the theft of taxpayer money, and hold fraudsters accountable."

These cases were prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Meghan Bean and were investigated jointly by the FBI and DOL- OIG.

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