

Department of Justice



**Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell
District of Massachusetts**

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CONTACT: CHRISTINA DiIORIO-STERLING

Phone (617) 748-3356

usama.media@usdoj.gov

twitter.com/dmanews1

NEW JERSEY MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO UNEMPLOYMENT FRAUD RELATED TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BOSTON – A New Jersey man pleaded guilty today in connection with his involvement in a scheme to fraudulently obtain COVID-19-related unemployment assistance.

Omar Thompson, 39, of Paterson, N.J., pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud conspiracy. U.S. District Court Judge Allison D. Burroughs scheduled sentencing for March 22, 2022. Thompson was charged by criminal complaint on Aug. 19, 2021.

In March 2020, in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). The CARES Act created a temporary federal unemployment insurance program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which in Massachusetts is administered by the Department of Unemployment Assistance. This program provides unemployment insurance benefits for individuals who are not eligible for other types of unemployment benefits.

According to the charging documents, Thompson and his co-conspirator submitted more than 100 fraudulent PUA claims resulting in more than \$1.2 million in payments. It is alleged that approximately half of the PUA claims were made on behalf of individuals residing outside of Massachusetts. In some instances, Thompson recruited individuals from other states to apply for PUA in Massachusetts, submitted claims on their behalf, and received kickback payments for doing so.

The charge of wire fraud provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell; Frederick J. Regan, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Secret Service, Boston Field Office; and Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations made the announcement. The Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Secret Service, Newark Field Office; and New Jersey State Police provided assistance in the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Markham of Mendell's Securities, Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit is prosecuting the case.

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>.

The details contained in the charging documents are allegations. The remaining defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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