

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Rhode Island

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, April 1, 2022

Rhode Island Man Admits to Fraudulently Filing for COVID-Relief Unemployment Benefits

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – A Providence man who filed fraudulent online COVID-relief unemployment insurance claims in five states pled guilty today in federal court to a charge of wire fraud, announced United States Attorney Zachary A. Cunha and Rhode Island Attorney General Peter F. Neronha.

According to charging documents and information presented to the court, in May 2020, Jesse Hazard, 31, who worked only in Massachusetts, submitted an online application seeking expanded pandemic unemployment benefits from the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance. Despite receiving these benefits from Massachusetts, between June 17, 2020, and September 12, 2020, Hazard filed similar online benefit applications with unemployment agencies in five other states: Arizona, Nevada, California, Colorado, and Nebraska. In his applications, Hazard falsely claimed that he worked in, or was a resident of, each of those states.

Hazard received \$12,876 in funds from California; his claims to Arizona, Nevada, Nebraska, and Colorado were denied. The total loss, both actual and intended, amounts to \$48,152.

Hazard is scheduled to be sentenced on July 14, 2022. The defendant's sentence will be determined by a federal district judge after consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

This case, as well as other instances of criminal activity related to fraudulent applications for pandemic-related unemployment insurance benefits are being investigated jointly by the FBI, the Rhode Island State Police, and the U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General. Cases are jointly reviewed, charged, and prosecuted by a team of prosecutors that include Assistant U.S. Attorneys Denise M. Barton, Stacey P. Veroni, and G. Michael Seaman, and Rhode Island Assistant Attorney General John M. Moreira, chief of the Rhode Island Attorney General's Public Integrity Unit.

United States Attorney Cunha and Attorney General Neronha thank the United States Secret Service and Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations for their assistance in the investigation of this matter.

Rhode Islanders who believe their personal identification has been stolen and used to fraudulently obtain unemployment benefits are urged to contact the Rhode Island State Police at financialcrimes@risp.gov or the FBI Providence office at (401) 272-8310.

On May 17, 2021, the United States 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>.

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Coronavirus
Financial Fraud

Component(s):

[Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#)
[USAO - Rhode Island](#)

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