

PRESS RELEASE

Two Capital Region Men Plead Guilty to Unemployment Insurance Fraud Conspiracy

Monday, March 6, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of New York

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Taquan Parker, age 26, of Rensselaer, New York, and Olajuwon Sutherland, a/k/a "Suave," age 27, of Troy, New York, pled guilty today to engaging in a fraudulent scheme to obtain more than \$100,000 in unemployment insurance benefits under the names of other people, including benefits funded by the federal government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The announcement was made by United States Attorney Carla B. Freedman; Matthew Scarpino, Special Agent in Charge of the Buffalo Field Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); New York State Inspector General Lucy Lang; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge, New York Region, United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (USDOL-OIG); and Ketty Larco-Ward, Inspector in Charge of the Boston Division of the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS).

As part of his guilty plea to conspiracy and mail fraud charges, Parker admitted that he provided Kahleke Taylor, a/k/a "Flex," with the personal identifying information of two other people, which Taylor used to file false claims online with the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL). Parker further admitted that as a result of the fraudulent applications submitted by Taylor, the NYSDOL paid out \$60,132 in unemployment insurance benefits. Parker agreed to pay \$60,132 in restitution to the State of New York and forfeit \$30,000 in fraud proceeds that he personally obtained.

As part of his guilty plea to conspiracy, mail fraud and wire fraud charges, Sutherland admitted that he also provided Taylor with the personal identifying information of two other people, which Taylor used to file false claims online with the NYSDOL. Sutherland further admitted that as a result of the fraudulent applications submitted by Taylor, the NYSDOL paid out \$48,008 in unemployment insurance benefits. Sutherland agreed to pay \$48,008 in restitution to the State of New York and forfeit \$12,000 in fraud proceeds that he personally obtained.

Taylor [previously pled guilty](#) to fraudulently obtaining \$207,004 in unemployment insurance benefits as part of the scheme.

At sentencing, both Parker and Sutherland face a maximum term of 20 years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to 3 years. Parker and Sutherland are scheduled to be sentenced on July 6 and July 12, 2023, respectively, by United States District Judge Mae A. D'Agostino. A defendant's sentence is imposed by a judge based on the particular statute the defendant is charged with violating, the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other factors.

This case was investigated by HSI, the New York State Inspector General's Office, USDOL-OIG, and USPIS, with assistance from the NYSDOL Office of Special Investigations and the Schenectady County Department of Social Services. Assistant U.S. Attorney Joshua R. Rosenthal 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>.

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