

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Maryland

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, December 2, 2022

**Eleven Defendants Facing Federal Charges Relating to
Unemployment Insurance Fraud Scheme with More Than
\$1.6 Million in Losses**

**The Defendants Allegedly Submitted over 200 Fraudulent Unemployment
Insurance Claims Using the Personal Identifying Information of Victims**

Baltimore, Maryland – A federal grand jury has returned a superseding indictment adding two new defendants to the nine defendants previously charged in relation to a Maryland and California unemployment insurance scheme. The superseding indictment charges the defendants with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, and stealing a post office key. The superseding indictment was returned on November 30, 2022. Charged in the superseding indictment are:

Michael Akame Ngwese Ay Makoge, a/k/a “2Hype”, age 28, of Laurel, Maryland;
Dementrous Von Smith, a/k/a “Meecho” and “El Meecho”, age 26, of Waldorf, Maryland;
Nadine Mahoro Mwamikazi, age 25, of Silver Spring, Maryland;
Sky Tiffany Lawson, age 28, of Bowie, Maryland;
Christopher Thomas Yancy, a/k/a “Lil Bhri”, age 30, of Laurel, Maryland;
Sayquan Leon Bridges, a/k/a “Quan”, age 27, of Bowie, Maryland;
Christian Malik Adrea, a/k/a “Lil Leak”, age 24, of Mitchellville, Maryland;
Stephawn Malik Watson, a/k/a “O-Dawg”, age 27, of District Heights, Maryland;
Aiyanna Mone Washington, a/k/a “Yanna”, age 27, of Glenarden, Maryland;
Trez Anthony Hendy, a/k/a “Torch,” age 29, of Silver Spring, Maryland; and
Tayonna Sonora Johnson, age 28, of Silver Spring, Maryland.

The superseding indictment was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Erek L. Barron; Postal Inspector in Charge Damon E. Wood of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service - Washington Division (USPIS); Acting Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer, of the Washington Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG); and Chief Amal E. Awad of the Anne Arundel County Police Department; Special Agent in Charge James C. Harris of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Baltimore; Colonel Woodrow W. Jones III, Superintendent of the Maryland State Police (MSP); and Special Agent in Charge Toni M. Crosby of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Baltimore Field Division.

The 46-count indictment alleges that, from February 2020 to October 2021 the defendants conspired to impersonate victims to submit fraudulent claims for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits in Maryland and California. As part of the scheme to defraud, the defendants allegedly obtained the birthdates, social security numbers, and other personal identifying information of numerous victims which they used to prepare and submit fraudulent applications for UI benefits. According to the indictment, the applications contained false information, including the victims' contact information, states of residence, and availability for work. These fraudulent applications allegedly caused financial institutions to load UI benefits onto debit cards and mail the cards to physical addresses provided and monitored by the defendants. The indictment alleges that once the defendants received the fraudulently obtained benefits on the debit cards, they used them for cash withdrawals

and other transactions for their own financial benefit. As alleged in the indictment, the defendants submitted over 200 fraudulent UI claims, resulting in more than \$1.6 million in losses.

Further, the indictment alleges that in October 2021, Yancy unlawfully possessed a Postal Service key and intended to improperly use the key.

If convicted, all the defendants face a maximum sentence of 30 years in federal prison for the conspiracy and for each count of wire fraud in which they are charged; and a mandatory two years in federal prison, consecutive to any other sentence imposed, for aggravated identity theft. Yancy also faces a maximum sentence of 10 years for unlawfully possessing a U.S. Postal Service key. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after taking into account the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

An indictment is not a finding of guilt. An individual charged by indictment is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty at some later criminal proceedings.

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>.

United States Attorney Erik L. Barron commended the USPIIS, DOL-OIG, the Anne Arundel County Police Department, HSI, MSP, and ATF, for their work in the investigation. Mr. Barron thanked the United States Marshals Service, the Prince George's County Police Department, the Montgomery County Police Department, the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department and the Charles County Sheriff's Office for their assistance. Mr. Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Colleen McGuinn, who is prosecuting the federal case.

For more information on the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to help the community, please visit www.justice.gov/usao-md and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>.

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Topic(s):
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Financial Fraud
Identity Theft

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