PRESS RELEASE

Final Defendant Sentenced in Federal Pandemic Fraud Unemployment Benefits Scheme

Thursday, November 13, 2025

For Immediate Release
U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Virginia

17 Defendants Stole $341,205 Combined in Pandemic Relief Money
Editor's Note: This matter occurred on the date indicated but was not published at that time due to a lapse in federal appropriations. Press releases are posted and made available following the return to normal operations

ABINGDON, Va. – The final defendant charged in a 17-member conspiracy who defrauded the United States, committed program fraud and mail fraud in connection with a scheme involving the filing of fraudulent claims for pandemic unemployment benefits was sentenced October 14 in U.S. District Court in Abingdon.

On October 9, 2025, Jason Dale Worley, 47, of Meadowview, Virginia, was sentenced to serve 12 months and 1 day in prison for filing a fraudulent claim for pandemic unemployment benefits. Worley was also ordered to pay restitution to the Virginia Employment Commission in the amount of $9,698, which represents the total pandemic unemployment benefits for which he filed fraudulent claims or recertifications.

Earlier this year, Crystal Shaw was sentenced to 60 months in federal prison for her role in the conspiracy. Shaw, one of the lead organizers of this conspiracy, was sentenced to the statutory maximum term of imprisonment. She was also ordered to pay $287,459 in restitution to the Virginia Employment Commission for her role in this conspiracy.

Previously sentenced as part of the conspiracy were 15 other co-defendants: Joseph Hass, 27 months; Brian Addair, 24 months; Russell Stiltner, 24 months; Daniel Horton, 21 months; Christopher Webb, 20 months; Cara Camille Bailey, 19 months; Jessica Lester, 19 months; Justin Meadows, 18 months; Terrence Vilacha, 18 months; and Clinton Michael Altizer, Stephanie Amber Barton, Jeramy Blake Farmer, and Hayleigh McKenzie Wolfe were each sentenced to 12 months and 1 day. Jonathan Webb, the individual charged with recruiting others to file fraudulent claims, mostly inmates at local jails, was sentenced to 48 months in prison and was ordered to pay $150,218 in restitution. Josef Brown, another incarcerated individual who recruited others to file fraudulent claims, was sentenced to 35 months in prison and was ordered to pay $119,660 in restitution.

In total, the defendants stole $341,205 in pandemic relief funds to which they were not entitled.

All defendants were also ordered to pay restitution to the Virginia Employment Commission for the fraudulent claims and fraudulent recertifications.

According to court documents, between March 2020 and September 2021, Josef Brown, Jonathan Webb, and Crystal Shaw developed a scheme to file fraudulent claims and recertifications for pandemic unemployment befits via the Virginia Employment Commission website. The scheme involved the collection of personal identification information (PII) of inmates housed at SWVRJA-Haysi and Abingdon, as well as personal friends and acquaintances of Brown, Webb, and Shaw. The conspirators used that information to file fraudulent claims and recertifications for pandemic unemployment benefits for incarcerated individuals and others who were ineligible for the benefits.

As part of the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) Task Force, this investigation was conducted by the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery. The PRAC's 20 member Inspectors General were charged with identifying major risks that cross program and agency boundaries to detect fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in the more than $5 trillion in COVID-19 spending. According to the United States Department of Labor, Virginia paid approximately $1.1 billion in fraudulent unemployment claims between April 1, 2020, and March 31, 2021.

Acting United States Attorney Robert N. Tracci, Ian Kaufman, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Richmond Division, Syreeta Scott, Special Agent in Charge, Mid-Atlantic Region, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares announced the sentences.

Agencies that assisted with this investigation included the Dickenson County Sheriff's Office, the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority, the FBI, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, and the Virginia Employment Commission.

Special Assistant United States Attorney M. Suzanne Kerney-Quillen, a Senior Assistant Attorney General and Deputy Section Chief of the Virginia Attorney General's Major Crimes and Emerging Threats Section, and Assistant United States Attorney Danielle Stone are prosecuting the case for the United States.

Updated November 13, 2025

Topic

FINANCIAL FRAUD

Component

USAO - Virginia, Western