

PRESS RELEASE

Former State Employee and Co-Conspirator Sentenced for Stealing Unemployment Insurance Benefits

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Michigan

DETROIT - A former employee of the State of Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency and her former romantic partner were sentenced today for their roles in an unemployment insurance fraud conspiracy, announced United States Attorney Jerome F. Gorgon Jr.

Timeka Johnson, 44, was sentenced to 42 months in prison after having pleaded guilty to engaging in aggravated identity theft and conspiring to engage in wire fraud. Johnson's co-conspirator Ray Anthony Eddington, 45, was sentenced to 36 months after having pleaded guilty to conspiring to engage in wire fraud.

Joining in the announcement were Joseph V. Cuffari, Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security—Office of Inspector General; Megan Howell, Special Agent-in-Charge, Great Lakes Region, U.S. Department of Labor—Office of Inspector General; Jennifer Runyan, Special Agent in Charge of the Detroit Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and Jason Palmer, Director of the State of Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency.

The defendants were sentenced by United States District Court Chief Judge Stephen J. Murphy, III.

Johnson was an employee for the State of Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency (MUIA). Her duties included reviewing, processing, and verifying the legitimacy of unemployment insurance claims.

According to court records, Johnson used her insider access to fraudulently process claims in the names of third parties. As part of the scheme, Johnson personally:

- accessed third-party unemployment insurance assistance claim information without authorization;
- dismissed and improperly closed fraud prevention triggers and information requests relating to third-party unemployment insurance assistance;
- uploaded false and fraudulent documentation to support illegitimate unemployment insurance assistance claims, including false and fraudulent personal identifying information in the names of third parties;
- falsely and fraudulently certified the entitlement of third-party claims as being eligible to receive unemployment insurance assistance funds;
- caused at least one other Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency employee to fraudulently access and alter third-party unemployment insurance assistance claim information for Johnson's benefit in exchange for financial compensation from Johnson;
- caused unauthorized debit cards to be issued in the names of third-party unemployment insurance assistance claimants;
- caused improper payments to be issued in connection with unemployment insurance assistance claims; and
- conducted unauthorized cash withdrawals of unemployment insurance assistance issued in the name of a third party.

According to court records, many of the third-party unemployment benefits that Johnson fraudulently caused to be issued were withdrawn from local ATMs by Eddington, her former romantic partner.

As a result of the conspiracy, over \$250,000 in fraudulent unemployment assistance payments were made by the State of Michigan.

As part of their sentences, the defendants were ordered to pay \$250,001 in restitution.

"It is one thing to steal if you are hungry and can't find a job. But it is despicable to abuse your position of trust so that you can steal from a program needed to help the unemployed," stated U.S. Attorney Gorgon.

"DHS Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D., said, "Government employees are entrusted to protect the integrity of these crucial aid programs. Those who betray that trust will be held accountable. The Office of Inspector General remains committed to aggressively investigating anyone who abuse their position, betray the public trust, and conspire with others to defraud government programs intended for a vulnerable population. We appreciate the continued partnership between DHS OIG and our law enforcement partners in bringing these individuals to justice".

"Today's sentencings of Ray Eddington and Timeka Johnson demonstrate the Office of Inspector General's commitment to investigate bad actors who defraud the unemployment insurance program for financial gain, particularly those like Timeka Johnson who abused her position of trust as a Unemployment Insurance Examiner. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to bring to justice those who seek to exploit these critical U.S. Department of Labor programs, especially when it involves serious insider threats," said Megan Howell, Special Agent-in-Charge, Great Lakes Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

"As a State of Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency Investigator, Timeka Johnson had insider access and the authority to help people—instead, she abused that trust by teaming up with Ray Eddington and others to commit identity theft and fraud. Their actions harmed the very communities that rely on these unemployment resources the most," said Jennifer Runyan, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Detroit Field Office. "This sentencing should serve as a reminder to anyone who defrauds Michigan's assistance programs: FBI Detroit will never stop working to hold those accountable who abuse them. I want to recognize my team from the FBI Detroit Area Corruption Task Force, alongside our partners at the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, the State of Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency, and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Michigan for their thorough work and successful prosecution in securing this sentence."

"Timeka Johnson's actions prove once again that crime doesn't pay. UIA aggressively goes after anyone who thinks they can get away with stealing taxpayer money," said Jason Palmer, UIA Director. "I'm proud of the success our dedicated, professional agents have had in helping to bring bad actors to justice, especially those who worked for the agency."

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Andrew J. Yahkind. The investigation is being conducted jointly by the Department of Homeland Security—Office of Inspector General, Department of Labor—Office of Inspector General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Unemployment Insurance Agency, Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity

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