

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Maryland

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, July 21, 2022

Four Maryland Residents Facing Federal Indictment for CARES Act COVID-19 Unemployment Fraud Scheme with More Than \$3 Million in Losses

Baltimore, Maryland – A federal grand jury has returned an indictment charging four Maryland residents with federal conspiracy and wire fraud charges related to a CARES Act unemployment insurance fraud scheme with more than \$3 million in losses. The indictment was returned on July 13, 2022, and unsealed today upon the arrests of the defendants. Charged in the indictment are:

Tyshawna Davis, age 38, of Gwynn Oak, Maryland;
Tiia Woods, age 44, of Cockeysville, Maryland;
Donna Jones, age 55, of Hanover, Maryland; and
Devante Smith, age 27, of Baltimore.

Davis, Jones, and Smith had initial appearances this afternoon in U.S. District Court in Baltimore before U.S. Magistrate Judge Beth P. Gesner. They were released under the supervision of U.S. Pretrial Services. Woods is detained in the Middle District of Florida pending a detention hearing scheduled for July 22, 2022.

The indictment was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Erik L. Barron; Acting Special Agent in Charge Troy Springer of the Washington Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations; and Special Agent in Charge Thomas J. Sobocinski of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Baltimore Field Office.

According to the 14-count indictment, from June 2020 through May 2021, the defendants used the personally identifiable information (PII) of victims to fraudulently obtain unemployment insurance benefits. The CARES Act expanded states' ability to provide unemployment insurance benefits for workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and allowed states to give an additional \$600 per week to individuals collecting regular unemployment insurance compensation during certain months in 2020.

The indictment alleges that the defendants obtained the names, dates of birth, and social security numbers of victims using false pretenses, then used the PII to submit and certify fraudulent Maryland unemployment insurance (UI) benefit applications in the victims' names. For example, the indictment alleges that as part of the conspiracy a Maryland UI application was submitted in the name of Davis's deceased ex-husband. The defendants allegedly caused the UI benefits to be loaded onto debit cards which were mailed to the addresses of the defendants, rather than the victims. The indictment alleges that the defendants used the fraudulently obtained debit cards to make cash withdrawals and other transactions throughout Maryland. The defendants allegedly used the cash for their own benefit and for the benefit of others who were also not entitled to the money, including by purchasing luxury vehicles. The indictment seeks the forfeiture of two 2021 Mercedes-Benz automobiles and any other proceeds of the scheme.

The indictment alleges that as a result of the scheme, at least 160 fraudulent UI claims were submitted in Maryland, with a loss of more than \$3 million. The indictment details 13 specific wire transfers involving fraudulent UI benefits obtained in the names of eight separate victims.

If convicted, the defendants each face a maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison for the conspiracy and for each count of wire fraud. 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.

United States Attorney Erik L. Barron commended DOL-OIG and the FBI for their work in the investigation. Mr. Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Zachary H. Ray and Christine Goo, who are 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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