

**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of Ohio

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, March 17, 2022

**Leader of Pandemic Unemployment Insurance Benefits Scheme Sentenced to Prison and Ordered to Pay More Than \$350k in Restitution**

Acting U.S. Attorney Michelle M. Baeppler announced that Lawrence Lawson, 41, of Cleveland, Ohio, was sentenced on March 15, 2022, to 51 months in prison and ordered to pay \$355,849 in restitution after Lawson pleaded guilty to his role in a conspiracy that fraudulently obtained COVID-19 pandemic unemployment insurance benefits.

“Mr. Lawson and his codefendants stole taxpayer dollars intended to help our neighbors and community members pay their bills and obtain basic necessities while the pandemic disrupted lives and caused many to lose their jobs or livelihood,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Michelle M. Baeppler. “This is not a victimless crime. If you steal from the government, you will be caught and you will be held accountable.”

“The deliberate actions of these individuals to cheat a program designed to assist people who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is inexcusable,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge, Eric B. Smith. “Financial crimes involving pandemic unemployment assistance affects self-employed individuals, independent contractors, gig-economy workers, and others who don’t qualify for traditional unemployment benefits. The FBI will continue to stand steadfast with other federal agencies to enhance the investigative work needed when examining complex financial fraud cases.”

“The egregious and self-serving actions of these fraudsters robbed federal aid and assistance from hard-working Americans experiencing unprecedented economic hardships as a result of the global pandemic,” stated Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Brandon Gardner with the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Inspector General (OIG). “HUD OIG is committed to working with its law enforcement partners to protect the integrity of federally funded housing programs and diligently pursue action against those who seek to illegally benefit from them.”

Charged as co-conspirators in the indictment were Cierra Clifton, 38, Willowick, Ohio; Emanuel Smith, 49, Cleveland, Ohio; Terrance Jones, 27, Cleveland, Ohio; Quantez Lawson, 29, Cleveland, Ohio; Charles Moore, 35, Cleveland, Ohio and Mark Dailey, 54, Cleveland, Ohio.

According to court records, from May through November of 2020, Lawson would recruit co-conspirators and other individuals to file pandemic unemployment insurance benefit claims on their behalf in exchange for a portion of the proceeds received.

Court records state that these individuals then provided Lawson and Clifton with their personal identifying information, and Clifton would file the claims on their behalf from her residence in Willoughby, Ohio. Clifton submitted claims through the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) and other State Workforce Agencies (SWAs) in Pennsylvania, Arizona, Rhode Island, Delaware, Hawaii, Montana, Arizona and California.

If a claim was processed successfully, a pre-loaded bank-issued debit card was mailed to the recipient. Lawson and Clifton then took a portion of the funds received as payment. As ODJFS and the other SWAs required re-certification of an unemployed person's status, Lawrence and Clifton charged an additional weekly fee to provide this service to their co-conspirators. If an individual failed to pay this fee, Lawrence and Clifton ceased verification of the unemployment status and the benefits would stop.

As a result of the scheme, ODJFS and other SWAs suffered a loss of approximately \$355,849.

Previously sentenced in this matter were:

- Cierra Clifton was sentenced to 16 months in prison and ordered to pay \$355,849 in restitution.
- Emmanuel Smith was sentenced to 17 months in prison and ordered to pay \$23,783 in restitution.
- Terrance Jones was sentenced to 26 months in prison and ordered to pay \$355,849 in restitution.
- Charles Moore was sentenced to 8 months in prison and ordered to pay \$15,246 in restitution.
- Quantez Lawson is scheduled to be sentenced on March 24, 2022.

“Lawrence Lawson conspired to file fraudulent unemployment insurance claims, diverting vital taxpayer resources away from those in dire need of unemployment benefits. Protecting the integrity of the unemployment insurance program remains one of our highest priorities, and we will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to safeguard the unemployment benefits for those who need it, especially during this critical time,” said Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, Chicago Region.

This case was investigated by the FBI, U.S. Department of Labor-Office of Inspector General and the U.S. Housing and Urban Development-Office of Inspector General. This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Megan R. Miller and Erica D. Barnhill.

If you believe you've been a victim of unemployment insurance fraud, please report the matter to the National Center for Disaster Fraud by calling (866) 720-5721 or visiting [www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud](http://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud).

**Topic(s):**

Coronavirus  
Financial Fraud

**Component(s):**

[USAO - Ohio, Northern](#)

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