

PRESS RELEASE

Maryland Career Offender Sentenced to 14 Years for Leading Fentanyl Distribution Ring and Using Stolen Identities to Fleece State Unemployment Insurance Programs

Wednesday, May 8, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Columbia

WASHINGTON – Collin Edwards, 29, of Largo, Maryland, was sentenced today to 168 months in prison for leading a group involved in manufacturing counterfeit oxycodone pills mixed with fentanyl and for using stolen personal identifying information (PII) to file fraudulent unemployment insurance claims that netted more than \$250,000, announced U.S. Attorney Matthew M. Graves, FBI Special Agent in Charge David J. Scott of the FBI Washington Field Office Criminal and Cyber Division; and Special Agent in Charge of the National Capital Region Troy W. Springer, of the U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General.

Edwards, also known as "Chills," pleaded guilty on November 9, 2023, in U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia to a felony charge of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute 400 or more grams of a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of fentanyl and a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of cocaine. Edwards admitted that he, and the members of his conspiracy, were accountable for producing and distributing at least 1.2 kilograms of a mixture containing a detectable amount of fentanyl. Edwards also pleaded guilty to aggravated identity theft.

In addition to the 14-year in prison term, U.S. District Judge Amit P. Mehta ordered Edwards to serve five years of supervised release. Edwards previously agreed to forfeit \$100,000.

According to court documents, this case began with the June 21, 2021, discovery of a make-shift drug lab in Laurel, Maryland. In August 2021, law enforcement began investigating Edwards and others and learned that the group was running a fentanyl pill pressing operation in and around Washington, D.C., and Maryland, renting apartments with stolen identities, for the purpose of manufacturing and distributing these counterfeit pills. Edwards and six others were identified as participants in the drug trafficking operation.

Law enforcement identified another apartment Edwards and the group were renting in a fictitious identify, this time, a high-end luxury apartment located in the Navy Yard area of Washington, D.C. On Mar. 29, 2022, the FBI executed a search warrant at the apartment with Edwards present and seized baggies of pills and loose powder, together amounting to more than 516 pills and more than 76 grams of a mixture and substance containing fentanyl.

During the search of the apartment, authorities seized Edwards' cellphone. The phone contained countless text message conversations with other drug traffickers discussing pill sales in the hundreds and thousands. On May 15, 2020, for example, Edwards wrote to an unknown contact, "I'm over here counting out 5000 pills bro. Hold on." Edwards wrote co-conspirators on a regular basis to discuss the strength of the pills, the supply, and pricing. He also openly discussed moving an industrial pill press from the Laurel apartment to his girlfriend's father's home in Annapolis, Maryland following the discovery of the drug processing lab in Laurel.

The FBI also located troves of text messages between Edwards and others laying out a scheme to commit wire fraud involving unemployment insurance fraud. Edwards obtained database documents containing personal identifying information (PII) for hundreds of victims. The documents contained birthdates, social security numbers, home addresses, e-mail addresses, and past phone numbers. Edwards used this stolen PII to apply online for unemployment insurance benefits in victims' names. Edwards caused pre-loaded debit cards in victim names to be sent to the homes of his associates and family members. He then retrieved the cards and withdrew funds at ATM locations around the DMV area. Edwards admitted that he and other co-conspirators illegally netted at least \$250,000 through the scheme. Most victims had no knowledge that their identity had been used to apply for unemployment benefits.

Edwards was arrested in downtown Baltimore on October 20, 2022, a month after evading capture following a high-speed car chase.

Edwards has multiple prior convictions for drug offenses and armed robbery. According to court documents, one prior conviction stemmed from a gun-point robbery where Edwards and a co-conspirator threatened to blow a victim's head off in his own apartment. Edwards was on supervision for that offense while committing the crimes in this case.

Edwards is the last defendant to be sentenced in this investigation.

- On June 23, 2023, Chase Cole was sentenced to twelve months and one day of incarceration
- On October 13, 2023, Garnell Lucas was sentenced to 72 months of incarceration.
- On December 15, 2023, Tyron Waters was sentenced to 70 months of incarceration.
- On January 12, 2024, Laura Garvin was sentenced to 24 months of incarceration.

This case was investigated by the FBI's Washington Field Office and the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Kevin Rosenberg of the Fraud, Public Corruption, and Civil Rights Section with the assistance of former Special Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sarah J. Rasalam and Marnee Rand of the Violence Reduction and Trafficking Offenses Section.

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