

## PRESS RELEASE

# Richmond identity thief sentenced to over three years in prison for hundreds of fraudulent unemployment benefits claims

Thursday, December 18, 2025

### For Immediate Release

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

RICHMOND, Va. – A Richmond man was sentenced today to three years and six months in prison for a multi-state scheme designed to steal COVID-19 pandemic benefits slated for unemployed workers.

"At a moment of national urgency, Makka Garba and other fraudsters took advantage of the government programs designed to be a lifeline for American families in need," said Lindsey Halligan, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. "My office will vigorously pursue anyone who defrauds governmental programs to line their own pockets."

"During an unprecedented time when so many Americans struggled with the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Makka Garba and his co-conspirators callously exploited the unemployment insurance system by filing over 300 fraudulent claims with several states across the country, including the Commonwealth of Virginia," said Troy W. Springer, Special Agent in Charge, National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General. "Today's sentencing affirms the continued commitment of the Office of Inspector General, working in close collaboration with our many federal and state law enforcement partners, to vigorously protect the integrity of unemployment insurance programs and hold accountable those who seek to unlawfully enrich themselves."

According to court documents, Garba, 36, and his co-conspirators filed at least 346 false claims for pandemic-related unemployment benefits in the names of identity theft victims. Garba and his co-conspirators filed false claims with at least seven different state workforce agencies throughout the United States, including the Virginia Employment Commission, with which Garba and his co-conspirators filed at least 162 false claims for unemployment insurance benefits between October 2020 and February 2021. These false pandemic unemployment applications falsely represented that the victims were filing these claims and falsely represented the victims' eligibility for pandemic-related

unemployment benefits. In many cases, the victims were employed during the pandemic and were not eligible for such funds.

Garba and his co-conspirators received at least \$619,442 in funds to which they were not entitled. Garba and his co-conspirators designated electronic payment cards to be mailed to Garba with fraud proceeds, at which point Garba withdrew those funds from Richmond-area ATMs.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Avi Panth prosecuted the case.

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General and Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General investigated this case.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case No. 3:25-cr-45.

**Contact**

[USAVAE.Press@usdoj.gov](mailto:USAVAE.Press@usdoj.gov)

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**Topic**

**DISASTER FRAUD**

**Component**

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