

PRESS RELEASE

Third Georgia State Representative charged with pandemic unemployment fraud

Friday, January 30, 2026

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia

usagan.pressemails@usdoj.gov

ATLANTA - Dexter L. Sharper, a member of the Georgia House of Representatives, was charged today with making false statements to fraudulently obtain thousands of dollars of emergency pandemic unemployment assistance payments.

"While many of his constituents and fellow citizens were losing jobs and desperately needed unemployment assistance during the pandemic, Representative Sharper allegedly pretended to be out of work to collect a share of unemployment benefits for himself," said U.S. Attorney Theodore S. Hertzberg. "When government officials lie to take money, and do it while holding an elected office, it violates the trust of citizens and weakens faith in our elected government."

"These charges point to some disgraceful conduct at the highest level, which should shock and repulse every citizen", said Georgia State Inspector General Nigel Lange. "The alleged activities describe a disgusting abuse by an elected official who appeared to trade his integrity for money destined for those in need. Shameful."

"Dexter L. Sharper, while serving as an elected member of the Georgia House of Representatives, is alleged to have unlawfully enriched himself by improperly obtaining taxpayer funds from the unemployment insurance program intended to assist American workers who lost their jobs through no fault of their own," said Anthony P. D'Esposito, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General. "These charges reflect allegations, and the case will be resolved through the judicial process. We will continue our efforts to investigate and pursue accountability for those who are charged with defrauding taxpayers by exploiting Department of Labor programs."

“Nobody is above the law, including elected officials,” said FBI Atlanta Acting Special Agent in Charge Peter Ellis. “Those who violate the public trust and steal from taxpayers to fill their own pockets will be held accountable.”

According to U.S. Attorney Hertzberg, the charges, and other information presented in court: In 2020, in response to the forced closures of businesses and unprecedented economic hardship resulting from the COVID-19 emergency, the U.S. Congress created special unemployment compensation programs to provide cash assistance to individuals who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Applicants had to provide a certification for every week for which they wished to claim benefits, attesting to whether they were actively seeking work for the week and the reason they were unemployed.

Sharper, while serving as the Georgia State Representative for District 177, which includes portions of Lowndes County, allegedly applied for unemployment assistance benefits for April 2020 through May 2021. In his initial application, he stated that he had only one employer, Dexter Sharper Party Rental, which had employed him for 40 hours per week for over seven years, but had not worked since March 13, 2020. Then, in 38 separate weekly certifications, he stated that had not worked or earned any wages, was actively looking for work, and had not refused any work.

Contrary to those claims, Sharper was allegedly working and earning money from at least two—and sometimes three—jobs each week. He received at least \$325 every week from the Georgia General Assembly for his position as Georgia State Representative. Sharper’s party rental business was operating and generating income of up to \$2,231 of income per week. And Sharper was also collecting up to an additional \$275 per week for work as a musician.

As a result of the allegedly false initial application and 38 subsequent certifications, Sharper collected a total of \$13,825 of unemployment assistance benefits to which he was not entitled.

Dexter L. Sharper, 54, of Valdosta, Georgia, was arraigned today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Russell G. Vineyard, on federal charges of making false statements to obtain funds administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. Members of the public are reminded that the criminal information only contains charges. The defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government’s burden to prove the defendant’s guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

Two other Georgia State Representatives were previously charged with similar pandemic unemployment assistance fraud:

- Karen L. Bennett, Georgia State Representative for District 94 until she resigned on January 1, 2026, pleaded guilty on January 21, 2026, to federal charges of making false statements in connection with receiving \$13,940 of pandemic unemployment benefits.
- Sharon Henderson, Georgia State Representative for District 113, was federally indicted on December 2, 2025, for theft of government funds and making false statements in connection with receiving \$17,811 of pandemic unemployment benefits.

This case is being investigated by the Georgia Office of the State Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and DeKalb County District Attorney’s Office.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Garrett L. Bradford is prosecuting the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department’s response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice’s National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney’s Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

Updated January 30, 2026

Topics

CORONAVIRUS

PUBLIC CORRUPTION

Component

[USAO - Georgia, Northern](#)