

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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23 Indicted on Federal CARES Act Unemployment Fraud Charges

ABINGDON, Va. – A federal grand jury in Abingdon returned an indictment today charging 23 individuals with their roles in a large conspiracy to defraud the United States government by filing fraudulent claims for more than \$499,000 in pandemic unemployment benefits, mail fraud and associated offenses.

According to court documents, the defendants conspired to file claims for pandemic unemployment benefits through the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) website. The scheme involved submitting claims for various individuals who were not eligible to receive pandemic unemployment benefits, including for numerous inmates incarcerated in southwest Virginia regional jails.

Conspiracy members lied on the filings as part of the scheme to make filers appear eligible for benefits. Because pandemic unemployment benefits were paid weekly, each of those filings re-verified and re-certified the false statements on numerous occasions throughout the scheme.

In all, the conspiracy filed fraudulent claims for approximately 37 individuals, causing at least \$499,000 in false claims to be have been paid. In addition to those indicted, eight co-conspirators have already entered into plea agreements with the United States.

Those charged by the grand jury today include:

- Jeffrey R. Tackett, 29, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, two counts of aggravated identify theft, one count of obstruction of justice, and one count of making false statements.
- Jimmy W. Barnette, 28, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft, and one count of making false statements.
- George L. Buckles, 31, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft, and one count of making false statements.
- Joshua S. Carroll, 31, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Darrell D. Davis, 66, of Lebanon, Va., one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft, and one count of making false statements.

- Melinda R. Davis, 58, of Lebanon, Va., one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Eugene A. Grizzle, 19, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Joseph N. Hall, 42, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Wesley W. Hickman, 24, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Jacob B. Hicks, 35, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Timothy H. Hileman, 29, of Castlewood, Va., one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, one count of aggravated identify theft, one count of obstruction of justice, and one count of making false statements.
- Ajay Johnson, 25, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- John C. Johnson, Jr., 33, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- John C. Johnson, Sr., 57, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Randall D. Johnson, 41, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Marissa L. Kiser, 26, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Curtis E. Mullins, 25, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Danny L. Mullins, 49, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.

- James B. Mullins, 31, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft and one count of making false statements..
- Steven J. Mullins, 33, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Veronica S. Mullins, 47, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of emergency relief fraud, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, three counts of aggravated identify theft, one count of obstruction of justice, and one count of making false statements.
- Patrick A. Payne, 42, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft.
- Jeffery D. Wiseman, 27, one count of conspiracy to defraud the government, one count of mail fraud conspiracy, one count of mail fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft, and one count of making false statements.

Acting U.S. Attorney Daniel P. Bubar of the Western District of Virginia, Jonathan Mellone, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, Philadelphia Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General and Acting Special Agent in Charge is Darrell J. Waldon of the Internal Revenue Service- Criminal Investigation made the announcement.

The Department of Labor-Office of the Inspector General and the Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation, the Norton Police Department, and the Russell County Sheriff's Office are investigating the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel J. Murphy is prosecuting the case.

An indictment is merely an allegation and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Component(s):

[USAO - Virginia, Western](#)