

PRESS RELEASE

Brooklyn-Based Ninedee Gang Member Pleads Guilty to Covid-19 Unemployment Benefits Fraud Scheme

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York

Earlier today, in federal court in Brooklyn, Darnell Jones, also known as "EJ," pleaded guilty to conspiring to engage in wire fraud and committing aggravated identity theft. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 through August 2021, Jones engaged in a fraud scheme using stolen personal identifying information to fraudulently obtain more than \$800,000 from federally funded unemployment insurance programs established under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. In addition, as part of his guilty plea, Jones admitted to fraudulently obtaining personal identifying information, including bank account information, between May 2021 and October 2024, to commit wire fraud with an intended victim loss of more than \$3.5 million. The proceeding was held before United States District Judge Dora L. Irizarry. When sentenced, Jones faces up to 32 years in prison, with a mandatory minimum sentence of two years' imprisonment.

John J. Durham, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Christopher G. Raia, Assistant Director in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), and Jessica S. Tisch, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD), announced the guilty plea.

"Today, Jones admitted to his extensive fraud scheme to swindle millions of dollars of unemployment benefits by using the stolen identities of innocent victims," stated United States Attorney Durham. "Even worse, the federal funds were intended to provide relief to those most in need during the COVID-19 pandemic and instead were diverted by the defendant to finance violent crimes of the Ninedee gang in Brooklyn. My Office and our law enforcement partners recognize that a key means of dismantling violent gangs is, as here, to cut off their sources of income."

Mr. Durham also thanked the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General and the New York State Department of Labor, Office of Special Investigations for their assistance on the case.

“At the height of a global crisis, Darnell Jones exploited the identities of vulnerable New Yorkers to bankroll a violent gang’s criminal enterprise,” stated NYPD Commissioner Tisch. “His guilty plea today is a powerful reminder that no scam is too sophisticated, no network too hidden – we will find you, and we will bring you to justice. I commend our investigators, the FBI, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for their relentless pursuit of justice.”

According to court filings, witness testimony, and the record from the defendant’s detention hearing, Jones is a member of the Ninedee Gang, a violent criminal enterprise operating out of the Louis H. Pink Houses in East New York, Brooklyn, who led the gang’s fraud schemes. Ninedee Gang members were affiliated with the “5” and “6” Pink Houses apartment buildings and engaged in gang-related violence within and outside of the New York City Housing Authority complex. The Ninedee Gang protected its turf through violence, made money by selling drugs and committing fraud, and sought to silence those they perceived to be working with law enforcement. [Ninedee Gang members were responsible for the July 2020 murder of Shatavia Walls, a former federal witness who testified against a Ninedee Gang member in Brooklyn federal court in 2019.](#) Seven Ninedee Gang members have been prosecuted for their gang-affiliated crimes, including the murder in-aid-of-racketeering of Shatavia Walls. Five Ninedee defendants have pled guilty and a sixth, Maliek Miller, was convicted at trial in June 2024. The remaining defendant, high-ranking Ninedee leader Raquel Dunton, is charged with drug trafficking and acting as an accessory after-the-fact to Walls’ murder, among other crimes, and is awaiting trial.

Jones and other Ninedee Gang members engaged in “scamming,” or various financial fraud schemes, including check fraud, postal money order fraud, and unemployment benefits fraud. For example, beginning in approximately November 2020, Jones sent a co-conspirator text messages containing the names of 10 New York residents, the purpose of which was to obtain personally identifiable information (PII) for those individuals without their consent. The co-conspirator sent Jones the requested individuals’ dates of birth, Social Security numbers, and driver’s license numbers. In exchange, Jones paid the co-conspirator with cryptocurrency. Subsequently, Jones submitted fraudulent claims for unemployment insurance benefits to the New York State Department of Labor using the stolen PII. As introduced at the trial of Ninedee Gang leader Maliek Miller, text messages in 2020 showed that Jones coordinated with fellow Ninedee Gang member Kevin Wint about pooling their money to purchase

“glicks” or “plates,” which are references to firearms. Notably, in August 2021, law enforcement agents recovered two firearms, which were outfitted with laser sights, in a residence shared by Jones and Wint.

The government’s case is being handled by the Office’s Organized Crime and Gang Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Emily J. Dean and Irisa Chen are in charge of the prosecution with the assistance of Paralegal Specialist Theodore Rader.

The Defendant:

DARNELL JONES (also known as “EJ”)

Age: 30

Brooklyn, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 24-CR-369 (DLI)

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