

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of New Jersey

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, March 18, 2022

**Essex County Man Sentenced to 33 Months in Prison for
Conspiring to Fraudulently Obtain More Than \$700,000**

NEWARK, N.J. – An Essex County, New Jersey, man was sentenced today to 33 months in prison for conspiring to fraudulently obtain more than \$700,000, U.S. Attorney Philip R. Sellinger announced.

Jefferson Robert, 31, of Newark, previously pleaded guilty by videoconference before U.S. District Judge Julien X. Neals to an information charging him with conspiring to commit wire fraud. Judge Neals imposed the sentence by videoconference today.

According to documents filed in the case and statements made in court:

On March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was signed into law. The CARES Act created a new temporary federal program unemployment insurance program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which provides unemployment insurance benefits (UIB) for individuals who are not eligible for other types of unemployment (e.g., self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers). The CARES Act also created a new temporary federal program that provides an additional \$600 weekly benefit to those eligible for PUA and regular UIB. The Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD) administers and manages the regular unemployment and PUA programs in the State of Washington.

Robert opened bank accounts with a fraudulent passport in another individual's name. He and his conspirators then caused an application to be made to ESD for UIB in the name of a victim. In response, ESD caused UIB to be deposited into one of the fraudulent bank accounts. Robert and his conspirators: partook in business email scams, including causing a victim to transfer approximately \$28,000 into one of the bank accounts; partook in romance scams, including causing a victim to make five deposits into one of the bank accounts totaling approximately \$19,000; and fraudulently obtained money from the IRS by causing the IRS to transfer payments in four victims' names into one of the bank accounts. Once the fraudulently obtained money was in the bank accounts, Roberts moved the money, including through the purchase of money orders. Robert and his conspirators caused more than \$700,000 in losses.

In addition to the prison term, Judge Neals sentenced Robert to three years of supervised release and ordered him to pay restitution of \$675,371.

U.S. Attorney Sellinger credited postal inspectors of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in Newark, under the direction of Inspector in Charge Damon Wood, Philadelphia Division; special agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Mellone in New York; and special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge George M. Crouch Jr. in Newark, with the investigation leading to today's sentencing.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew Kogan of the U.S. Attorney's Office Cybercrime Unit in Newark.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus

Component(s):
USAO - New Jersey

Press Release Number:
22-103