

PRESS RELEASE

Florida Woman Sentenced to Federal Prison for Supervising Maryland Unemployment Insurance Scheme

Monday, April 28, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Maryland

Defendant obtained victim's personal information to file false and fraudulent unemployment insurance claims.

Baltimore, Maryland – U.S. District Judge Julie R. Rubin sentenced Tiia Woods, 47, of Jacksonville, Florida, to 74 months in prison followed by three years of supervised release. The sentence is in connection with Woods's role as an organizer of an unemployment insurance (UI) fraud scheme. Through the conspiracy, victims lost approximately \$3,296,725.

Kelly O. Hayes, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the sentence with Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer, National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and Special Agent in Charge William J. DelBagno of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) – Baltimore Field Office.

According to the guilty plea, beginning in June 2020, and continuing through at least May 2021, Woods engaged in a conspiracy to defraud and obtain money through materially false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises in connection with the UI scheme. Woods obtained the personal identifiable information of real persons and used the information to submit false and fraudulent unemployment insurance claims to the Maryland Department of Labor (MD-DOL).

Woods and her co-conspirators used UI benefits, which were designated to assist unemployed or underemployed people due to the COVID-19 national emergency, for their personal use. She instructed her co-conspirators Tyshawna Davis and Devante Smith via text message in furtherance of the conspiracy. Woods's guidance included instructions on how to obtain benefits, expedite a claim, and how much Woods would keep for herself.

Smith was previously sentenced to 54 months in prison for his role in the conspiracy.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act — a federal law enacted in March 2020 — provided emergency financial assistance to Americans suffering from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CARES Act authorized increased unemployment insurance (“UI”) benefits. UI benefits have historically been a state and federal program that provided monetary benefits to eligible workers. The CARES Act expanded states’ ability to provide UI benefits for many workers impacted by COVID-19, including self-employed workers or independent contractors, who would not normally be eligible for UI benefits.

The District of Maryland Strike Force is one of five strike forces established throughout the United States by the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute COVID-19 fraud, including fraud relating to the CARES Act. The CARES Act was designed to provide emergency financial assistance to Americans suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The strike forces focus on large-scale, multi-state pandemic relief fraud perpetrated by criminal organizations and transnational actors. The strike forces are interagency law enforcement efforts, using prosecutor-led and data analyst-driven teams designed to identify and bring to justice those who stole pandemic relief funds.

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>.

U.S. Attorney Hayes commended the DOL-OIG and FBI, along with Bank of America – Detection and Complex Investigations Fraud Rings and Analytics, for their work in the investigation. Ms. Hayes also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Evelyn Lombardo Cusson and Harry M. Gruber who prosecuted the federal case.

For more information about the Maryland U.S. Attorney’s Office, its priorities, and resources available to report fraud, visit www.justice.gov/usao-md and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>.

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