

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Former Uniontown Man Sentenced to Prison for Conspiring to Obtain PUA Benefits while Incarcerated

PITTSBURGH, PA - A former resident of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, has been sentenced in federal court to six months imprisonment followed by a two-year term of supervised release on his conviction of conspiracy to commit an offense against the United States, Acting United States Attorney Stephen R. Kaufman announced today.

United States District Judge William S. Stickman IV imposed the sentence on Jamelle Fairfax, age 33.

In order to combat the devastating impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on the United States, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed into law. The CARES Act created the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) Program, which provided unemployment benefits to individuals not eligible for regular unemployment compensation or extended unemployment benefits. Individuals are eligible for PUA if they were unemployed due to the pandemic and could accept a job if one were offered.

While incarcerated at State Correctional Institution (SCI) Fayette, the defendant conspired to obtain PUA benefits. Due to his incarceration, the defendant was unemployed and unemployable for reasons unrelated to the pandemic. Nevertheless, the defendant's jail call recordings prove that he conspired with another to falsify material facts in a PUA application filed in the defendant's name. Specifically, the conspirators certified that Jamelle Fairfax was available to work and was only unemployed due to COVID-19. The total amount paid on the claim was \$11,100.00, which was money allocated to individuals in need of financial assistance during the global pandemic. The defendant was ordered to pay restitution for this amount.

"Jamelle Fairfax conspired to defraud the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program by having his co-conspirator fraudulently file for and receive benefits on his behalf while Fairfax was incarcerated at SCI Fayette. The United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General is grateful for our partnerships with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and our many law enforcement partners. We also want to thank the U.S. Attorney's Office for their continued efforts to prosecute those who violate public benefit programs and commit fraud," stated Syreeta Scott, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Philadelphia Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

Assistant United States Attorney Brendan J. McKenna prosecuted this case on behalf of the government.

Acting United States Attorney Kaufman commended the United States Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General and the United States Secret Service for the investigation leading to the successful prosecution of Fairfax.

Topic(s):
Coronavirus

Component(s):
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