

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Indian Trail Man Is Sentenced To 30 Months In Prison For Scheme To Defraud COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance Benefit Program

Separately, Charlotte Man Was Sentenced to 24 Months after His Federal Supervision Was Revoked for COVID-19 Relief Loan Fraud

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – U.S. District Judge Robert J. Conrad sentenced Joseph Ransome, 51, of Indian Trail, N.C., to 30 months in prison for wire fraud yesterday, for defrauding the COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefit program, announced Dena J. King, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina. Judge Conrad also ordered Ransome to serve three years of supervised release and to pay \$44,172 in restitution.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act is a federal law enacted March 29, 2020, designed to provide emergency financial assistance, including expanded UI benefits, to millions of Americans suffering the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to plea documents and statements made in court, from March 2020 through July 2020, Ransome received UI benefits to which he was not entitled. Court documents show that Ransome applied for fraudulent UI benefits in multiple states, including in North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, and elsewhere. Ransome filed for the UI benefits based on fraudulent claims, including non-existent employment and false reason for termination. For example, Ransome falsely claimed to have been laid off from Walmart in North Carolina due to COVID-19, when in fact Ransome had been laid off due to misconduct. Ransome also falsely claimed prior employment at Target, BestBuy, Lowe's, and Hobby Lobby, and falsely claimed that he had been laid off from some of these companies because he had been diagnosed with COVID-19 or due to lack of work because of the coronavirus when he had never in fact been employed by those companies. As a result of the fraudulent scheme, during the relevant time period, Ransome applied for more than \$163,000 in fraudulent UI benefits provided under the expanded CARES Act.

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In a separate case, Judge Conrad revoked Bryon Jones's supervised release after the defendant violated its terms by engaging in a scheme to defraud the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). According to court documents in this case, Jones, 66, of Charlotte, used false and fraudulent business information to apply for and receive through his business, Ramses Air Freight & Transport, Inc., \$142,900 in COVID-19 relief funds disbursed by the SBA under the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program. Jones, who was on a 10-year term of federal supervised release for a previous drug trafficking conviction, was ordered to serve 24 months in prison and five years of supervised release for the new violations.

In making today's announcement, U.S. Attorney King commended the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the FBI, and the Atlanta Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General, for their investigation of the Ransome case. Jones's investigation was conducted by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the SBA and the U.S. Probation Office.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Caryn Finley was in charge of the prosecution against Ransome. The Jones prosecution was handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Graham Billings.

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 Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>. Members of the public in the Western District of North Carolina are also encouraged to call 704-344-6222 to reach their local Coronavirus Fraud Coordinator.

Topic(s):
Coronavirus

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