PRESS RELEASE

Pair Plead Guilty in Federal Unemployment Scheme that Defrauded U.S. Taxpayers

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For Immediate Release
U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Virginia

ABINGDON, Va. – A pair of Virginia residents pleaded guilty recently to filing false claims for pandemic unemployment benefits authorized by the CARES Act. The CARES Act is a federal law, enacted in March of 2020, that was designed to provide emergency financial assistance to people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thonton Snapp, 50, of Bristol, Virginia, and Jacob Michael Testerman, 36, of Abingdon, Virginia, both pleaded guilty to one count of conspiring to defraud the United States and commit an offense against the United States by filing fraudulent claims for pandemic unemployment benefits authorized by federal law.

According to court documents, from July 2020 through September 2021, Snapp, Testerman, and others, conspired to file false and fraudulent claims for pandemic unemployment benefits. Co-conspirators provided personal identifying information (PII) to Martha Davis, who filed and recertified the false claims with the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC).

To perpetuate the scheme, Snapp's application listed a non-existent business, "Precision Carpentry" that was invented for the purpose of filing the fraudulent claims for unemployment benefits with the VEC.

Testerman provided his own PII and the PII of other incarnated individuals to Davis for the purpose of filing and recertifying fraudulent claims for unemployment benefits.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Department of Labor - Office of the Inspector General, and the Virginia Employment Commission investigated the case.

First Assistant United States Attorney Robert N. Tracci and Ian Kaufmann, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Richmond Division made the announcement.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Danielle Stone and Assistant U.S. Attorney M. Suzanne Kerney-Quillen are prosecuting the case.

On April 7, the Department of Justice announced the creation of the National Fraud Enforcement Division ("Fraud Division"). The Fraud Division is laser-focused on investigating and prosecuting those who commit fraud against the American people. The Department's work to combat fraud supports President Trump's Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, a whole-of-government effort chaired by Vice President J.D. Vance to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse within Federal benefit programs.

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