

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Previously Convicted Felon Sentenced to More Than 26 Years in Federal Prison for Possessing a Firearm in Connection With Drug Trafficking Fentanyl, Wire Fraud, and Aggravated Identity Theft**

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

**For Immediate Release**

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

**Defendant convicted after trial on drug and firearms offenses and thereafter pled guilty to wire fraud and aggravated identity theft**

**Baltimore**, Maryland – Today, Chief U.S. District Judge George L. Russell, III, sentenced Ryan E. Dales, 36, of Baltimore, to 26 years in federal prison, followed by five years of supervised release. Dales, a previously convicted felon, was charged with unlawfully possessing a firearm as a felon, possession with intent to distribute fentanyl, possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft.

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

“Mr. Dales’s criminal activity was callous, dangerous, and with complete disregard for his victims,” Hayes said. “Thanks to our federal, local, and state law-enforcement partners, we’re showing Mr. Dales and others that engaging in criminal activity comes with a price. We’re serious about holding those accountable who commit illegal acts and terrorize our community with fentanyl, firearms, and fraud. Fortunately, Mr. Dales will have plenty of time to think about his actions while in prison.”

"This sentence of 26 years reflects the seriousness of Dales' actions which include drug and weapon offenses as well as identity theft and fraud schemes. As a repeat offender, Dales knew the consequences of his wrongdoing yet chose to continue dealing drugs and committing crimes," DelBagno said. "The FBI has no tolerance for repeat offenders who threaten the safety and security of our communities."

"Ryan Dales engaged in a multi-faceted pandemic-relief fraud scheme that included filing fraudulent UI claims with the Maryland Department of Labor. Dales stole benefits intended for unemployed American workers who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic," Springer said. "The significant prison sentence imposed today is the direct result of outstanding collaboration with our partners at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland and the FBI in ensuring the integrity of these critical benefit programs. This is particularly true when it involves firearms and drug trafficking as well as other violent crimes in our communities."

On December 9, 2024, a federal jury found Dales guilty of unlawfully possessing a firearm as a felon, possession with intent to distribute fentanyl, and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. Additionally, Dales faced a second trial on wire fraud and aggravated identity theft charges, but on January 10, 2025, Dales pled guilty to wire fraud and aggravated identity theft.

According to the evidence presented at trial, on January 20, 2023, authorities arrested Dales pursuant to a federal arrest warrant, and law enforcement executed a federal search warrant the same day at Dales's residence. Dales resided in a luxury apartment building in Locust Point. During the search, law enforcement located and seized, among other things, various items used in connection Dales's illegal business selling drugs, including two loaded firearms, specifically, a stolen Smith & Wesson firearm, and one which was a privately made "ghost gun" Polymer80 9mm firearm with no serial number, and a box containing 28 rounds of 9mm ammunition, including hollow point ammunition. In addition, law enforcement seized numerous packages of controlled dangerous substances, including hundreds of grams of fentanyl packaged for street level distribution, multiple digital scales, sifters, a heat sealer, a bag containing 10,000 empty capsules meant to package drugs, other drug packing materials, various cutting agents, a respirator, and six cell phones.

Later, Dales voluntarily waived his *Miranda* rights and admitted to living in his apartment alone and that the firearms seized in his apartment were his. He also told law enforcement that he was a "very resourceful person," referring to his livelihood as a drug dealer. Dales' DNA was later determined to be present on both firearms and their magazines.

Law enforcement's later review of Dales's cell phones revealed the existence of numerous Telegram chats where he negotiated purchasing drugs and cutting agents from multiple people, including mass producers of fentanyl in China. Investigators further found evidence that about a month before the execution of the search warrant, Dales traveled to Boston with a firearm (identical in appearance to the ghost gun found in his apartment) and a bag full of cash to purchase drugs. Dales's device search history included searches for where fentanyl is produced in China, how to dye powders, and how many bullets a Smith and Wesson M&P 9c firearm — the same type seized from his apartment — can hold.

After his conviction at trial on the drug and firearms offenses, Dales pled guilty to a fraud scheme in which he used victims' identities to obtain various high-end lawnmowers on credit and received fraudulent unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. From December 2020 through September 2022 — while serving a federal sentence for bank-fraud conspiracy and aggravated identity theft — and living in a halfway house while on federal supervised release in the District of Maryland, Dales engaged in various fraudulent schemes. Dales attempted to defraud the State of Maryland, Maryland Department of Labor (MD-DOL), the Small Business Administration, and various businesses and financial institutions to obtain more than \$25,000 in unlawful COVID-19 benefits funds through the submission of fraudulent claims for UI benefits; more than \$95,000 worth of high-end riding lawn mowers on credit using the stolen personal identifiable information (PII) of seven victims information — such as names, dates of birth, social security numbers, and addresses of real persons — and attempting to fraudulently obtain an \$8,000 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL).

During the execution of the residential search warrant, law enforcement seized various items used in connection with Dales's fraud and identity theft schemes, including multiple computers, an embosser and ID card printer, laminate sheets with security holograms, gift cards in various denominations, a card printer and card reader, bulk packages of shrink-wrapped white PVC cards; and multiple fraudulent and fabricated South Carolina driver's licenses made by Dales containing PII of various victims, but which displayed Dales's photograph.

Dales used the fabricated driver's licenses in connection with the fraudulent purchases of riding mowers and other impermissible uses. He also obtained the identity theft victims' PII on the dark web. The total amount obtained by Dales from the UI fraud scheme, as well as the fraudulent purchase of the lawnmowers on credit was \$121,242.51.

This case is part of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), a program bringing together all levels of law enforcement and the communities they serve to reduce violent crime and

gun violence, and to make our neighborhoods safer for everyone. On May 26, 2021, the Department launched a violent crime reduction strategy strengthening PSN based on these core principles: fostering trust and legitimacy in our communities, supporting community-based organizations that help prevent violence from occurring in the first place, setting focused and strategic enforcement priorities, and measuring the results.

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 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (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, 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 FBI and DOL-OIG for their work in connection with the investigation. Ms. Hayes also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Paul A. Riley and Reema Sood, who prosecuted the federal case. She also recognized the assistance of the Maryland COVID-19 Strike Force Paralegal Specialist Joanna B.N. Huber.

For more information about the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to help the community, visit [www.justice.gov/usao-md](http://www.justice.gov/usao-md) and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>

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## Topics

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**DRUG TRAFFICKING**

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### Components

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