

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Central District of California

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Rapper Who Bragged About COVID-Related Jobless Benefits Scam Agrees to Plead Guilty to Federal Fraud and Firearm Charges

LOS ANGELES – A rapper who boasted in a YouTube music video about getting rich by committing pandemic-related unemployment benefits fraud has agreed to plead guilty to federal fraud and firearms charges, the Justice Department announced today.

Fontrell Antonio Baines, 33, a.k.a. “Nuke Bizzle,” of Memphis, Tennessee, has agreed to plead guilty to one count of mail fraud and one count of unlawful possession of a firearm and ammunition by a convicted felon.

Baines is expected to plead guilty to the charges in the coming days in United States District Court in downtown Los Angeles.

According to his plea agreement, from July 2020 to September 2020, Baines unlawfully exploited the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) provisions of the CARES Act to obtain unemployment insurance money to which he was not entitled. Congress implemented the PUA provisions to expand access to unemployment benefits to self-employed workers, independent contractors, and others who would not otherwise be eligible. Baines abused the program to obtain unemployment benefits administered by the California Employment Development Department (EDD) in the names of third parties, including identity theft victims.

The applications for these benefits listed addresses to which Baines had access in Beverly Hills and Koreatown. As a result, Baines was able to take possession of and use the debit cards that EDD pre-loaded with the unemployment benefits obtained through the fraudulent applications.

For example, Baines used the identity of a Missouri man who briefly attended school – but never worked – in California to apply for unemployment benefits. In September 2020, Baines used a debit card issued on the basis of the fraudulent PUA claim filed in the Missouri man’s name to withdraw approximately \$2,500.

Baines, who has been in federal custody since his arrest in October 2020, admitted that 92 fraudulent PUA claims were filed with EDD, resulting in attempted losses to EDD and the United States Treasury of approximately \$1,256,108 and actual losses of at least \$704,760.

According to an affidavit filed with a criminal complaint in this case, Baines bragged about his ability to defraud the EDD in a music video posted on YouTube and in postings to his Instagram account. In the music video called “EDD,” Baines boasts about doing “my swagger for EDD” and, holding up a stack of envelopes from EDD, getting rich by “go[ing] to the bank with a stack of these” – an apparent reference to the debit cards that came in the mail.

Baines further admitted that in October 2020 at his Hollywood Hills residence he illegally possessed a semi-automatic pistol with 14 rounds of ammunition. Baines was prohibited from possessing the firearm because he had previously sustained felony convictions, namely a conviction

in 2011 in Tennessee state court for unlawful possession of a controlled substance with intent to sell and a conviction in Nevada federal court in 2014 for being a felon in possession of a firearm.

Upon entering his guilty pleas, Baines will face a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison for the mail fraud count and 10 years in federal prison for the unlawful firearm and ammunition possession count. Baines has also agreed to forfeit funds totaling \$56,750 that were previously seized by law enforcement.

This matter was investigated by the United States Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, the United States Postal Inspection Service, IRS Criminal Investigation, and the California Employment Development Department. Substantial assistance was provided by the United States Marshals Service and the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

Assistant United States Attorney Ranee A. Katzenstein, Chief of the Major Frauds Section, and Assistant United States Attorney Alexander B. Schwab, also of the Major Frauds Section, are prosecuting this case.

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>.

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