

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, August 11, 2021

Southwest Virginia Man Sentenced in \$499,000 Unemployment Fraud Scheme

ABINGDON, Va. – A Southwest Virginia man was sentenced yesterday to 30 months in prison for conspiring with others to defraud the government of more than \$499,000 and to commit mail fraud.

According to court documents, Eric Mullins, 29, waived his right to be indicted and pleaded guilty in April 2021 to one count of conspiring to defraud the United States and one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud with respect to benefits authorized and paid in connection with a presidentially declared major disaster or emergency.

Mullins participated in a conspiracy to commit fraud against the United States in connection with a scheme involving the filing of fraudulent claims for pandemic unemployment benefits.

According to court documents, Mullins, and others, conspired to collect personal identification information of more than 35 co-conspirators, including 15 inmates in the custody of the Virginia Department of Corrections, and to file fraudulent claims of pandemic-related unemployment benefits.

Over the course of nine months, the conspiracy filed fraudulent claims for at least 37 individuals, with a total actual loss to the United States of at least \$499,000.

Acting United States Attorney Daniel P. Bubar of the Western District of Virginia, Darrell J. Waldon, IRS-CI Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Washington DC Field Office, and Syreeta Scott, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, Philadelphia Region, U. S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General announced the sentence today.

The Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General, the Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation, the Norton Police Department, and the Russell County Sheriff's Office investigated the case.

Assistant United States Attorney Daniel J. Murphy prosecuted the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please 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>.

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