

PRESS RELEASE

Three Sentenced for Pandemic-Related Unemployment Fraud, ID Theft

Friday, June 6, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Missouri

ST. LOUIS – U.S. District Judge Sarah E. Pitlyk on Friday sentenced a man who ran a scheme that falsely obtained COVID-19 pandemic-related unemployment insurance benefits and stole dozens of identities and credit cards to 65 months in prison and ordered him to pay restitution of \$116,587.

Daryl Jones Jr., 46, fraudulently obtained \$84,592 in COVID-19 pandemic-related unemployment insurance benefits from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania between June 22, 2020, and July 15, 2020. Jones obtained those benefits on debit cards fraudulently issued to him and four others. Four additional debit cards were issued using more stolen identities, but no unemployment benefits were deposited upon those cards.

Jones obtained some of the personal identifying information to set up the accounts from his girlfriend, Cheryl Johnson, who had supervised them at various St. Louis area businesses.

On June 3, 2021, Jones submitted counterfeit pay stubs from a fake business associated with Johnson to obtain a \$31,700 vehicle loan. He and Johnson submitted counterfeit insurance identification cards to accept delivery of the vehicle.

Jones and Johnson were using the St. Louis County home of James Whitiker to commit their crimes. On June 25, 2021, investigators performed a court-approved search of the home and found a notebook containing the names, Social Security numbers and birthdates of about 35 individuals. They also found two more pieces of paper with the identifying information of 18 other people, three stolen identification documents, nine Pennsylvania unemployment insurance benefit debit cards and stolen credit and debit cards.

“The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is charged with defending the nation’s mail system from illegal use. With the collaborative efforts of our federal law enforcement partners,

Postal Inspectors investigate fraudsters who utilize the U.S. Mail to perpetuate financial schemes to defraud others in order to enrich themselves. Postal Inspectors seek justice for victims, including the multiple individual consumer and business victims in this investigation,” said Inspector in Charge, Ruth Mendonça, who leads the Chicago Division of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, which includes the St. Louis Field Office.

Jones pleaded guilty in February in U.S. District Court to three felonies: conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud, aggravated identity theft and wire fraud.

Johnson, 44, pleaded guilty February 20 to conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud, aggravated identity theft and wire fraud. She was sentenced May 22 to 55 months in prison and ordered to repay \$116,587. Whitiker, 44, pleaded guilty in July to a conspiracy charge and was sentenced in October to three years of prison. He admitted using two debit cards during the conspiracy and admitted knowing that Jones and Johnson were using his home to commit the unemployment fraud.

The U.S. Postal Service and the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Tracy Berry prosecuted the case.

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