

PRESS RELEASE

Virginia Man Sentenced to Federal Prison for COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Insurance Benefits Scheme

Tuesday, July 1, 2025

For Immediate Release

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

Greenbelt, Maryland – Today, U.S. District Judge Lydia Kay Griggsby sentenced Alonzo Brown, 27, of Richmond, Virginia, to 45 months in federal prison, followed by three years of supervised release, for conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft, in connection with a conspiracy and scheme to defraud the Maryland Department of Labor (MD-DOL) and California Employment Development Department (CA-EDD). Judge Griggsby also ordered Brown to pay \$310,428.08 of restitution to the victims and forfeit all money, property, and/or assets derived from the scheme, including a money judgment of \$310,428.08.

Kelly O. Hayes, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the guilty plea with Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer, National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and Special Agent in Charge Kareem A. Carter, Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) – Washington Field Office.

According to the guilty plea, from at least June 2020 through March 2021, Brown conspired with Michael Cooley, 26, of Prince George's County, Maryland, and Isiah Lewis, 35, of Prince George's County, to devise and execute a scheme to defraud individuals and multiple state workforce agencies, including in Maryland and California, of more than \$800,000 in unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, successfully obtaining more than \$300,000. The scheme was sophisticated and used personal identifiable information — such as name, date of birth, and social security number — from more than 60 individuals to file online UI applications in Maryland and California, using anonymous email addresses to obscure their identities and avoid detection.

Griggsby sentenced Cooley to 87 months in federal prison for his role in the scheme back in April.

This case is part of the District of Maryland COVID-19 Strike Force, a Strike Force that 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 about the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit 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 justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form.

U.S. Attorney Hayes commended the DOL-OIG and IRS-CI for their work in the investigation. Ms. Hayes also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Bijon A. Mostoufi and Jared M. Beim, who are prosecuting this federal case, and Joanna B.N. Huber, who is supporting the case.

For more information about the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to report fraud, please visit justice.gov/usao-md and justice.gov/usao-md/report-fraud.

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Contact

Kevin Nash
USAMD.Press@usdoj.gov
410-209-4946

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