

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of New Jersey

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 7, 2022

Illinois Man Admits Stealing Unemployment Insurance Benefits while Incarcerated

NEWARK, N.J. – An Illinois man today admitted that he used other individuals' personal identification information to fraudulently obtain unemployment insurance benefits while he was incarcerated, U.S. Attorney Philip R. Sellinger announced.

Devontae Stokes, 27, of Country Club Hills, Illinois, pleaded guilty by videoconference before U.S. District Judge Madeline Cox Arleo to an information charging him with conspiring to commit wire fraud.

According to documents filed in the case and statements made in court:

On March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was signed into law. The CARES Act created a new temporary federal unemployment insurance program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which provided unemployment insurance benefits for individuals who were not eligible for other types of unemployment (e.g., the self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers). The CARES Act also created a new temporary federal program called Federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (FPUC) that provided an additional weekly benefit to those eligible for PUA and regular unemployment insurance benefits.

Between August 2020 and November 2020, Stokes was incarcerated at FCI Fort Dix, a federal correctional institutional with an adjacent satellite camp located in Fort Dix, New Jersey. Stokes and his conspirators obtained personal identification information (PII), including names, dates of birth, and Social Security numbers belonging to other individuals without those individuals' knowledge and consent. Stokes and his conspirators then used the PII to make fraudulent unemployment insurance benefits applications and obtained more than \$140,000 in benefits.

The charge of conspiring to commit wire fraud is punishable by a maximum potential penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of the greater of \$250,000, twice the gross profits to Stokes or twice the gross loss suffered by the victims, whichever is greatest. Sentencing is scheduled for Aug. 23, 2022.

U.S. Attorney Sellinger credited special agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Mellone, in New York; special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge George M. Crouch Jr., in Newark; and special agents with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jason J. Molina, in Newark, with the investigation leading to today's guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew Kogan of the U.S. Attorney's Office Cybercrime Unit in Newark.

Attachment(s):

[Download Stokes.Information.pdf](#)

Topic(s):
Coronavirus

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