

PRESS RELEASE

Waterbury Man Admits Theft of Pandemic Unemployment Benefits

Thursday, May 11, 2023

For Immediate Release

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

Vanessa Roberts Avery, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, today announced that OLAJUWON HARRINGTON, also known as "OJ Harrington" 31, of Waterbury, waived his right to be indicted and pleaded guilty yesterday before U.S. District Judge Omar A. Williams in Hartford to a fraud offense related to his theft of pandemic unemployment benefits.

According to court documents and statements made in court, in March 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 for pandemic unemployment assistance ("Pandemic Unemployment Assistance"). Pandemic Unemployment Assistance provided unemployment insurance ("UI") benefits for employed individuals who are not eligible for other types of UI due to their employment status. The CARES Act also created a new temporary federal program called Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation ("FPUC") that provided additional weekly benefits to those eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance or regular UI. The Connecticut Department of Labor (CT-DOL) administers UI benefits for residents of Connecticut.

Using identifying information of real persons ("victims") without their knowledge, Harrington submitted to CT-DOL numerous fraudulent applications for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. Relying on the applications, CT-DOL awarded unemployment assistance in the form of debit cards in the names of the victims and mailed the debit cards to addresses provided in the applications. Thereafter, Harrington obtained the debit cards issued in victims' names and unlawfully used the cards for his own benefit.

The government contends that the loss attributable to Harrington through this scheme is as much as \$793,254.

Harrington was arrested on a criminal complaint on November 30, 2022.

Harrington pleaded guilty to access device fraud, which carries a maximum term of imprisonment of 15 years. Judge Williams scheduled sentencing for August 23.

Harrington is released on a \$50,000 bond pending sentencing.

This investigation is being conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of Homeland Security – Office of Inspector General; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Social Security Administration – Office of Inspector General and the Connecticut Department of Labor. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher W. Schmeisser.

Individuals with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 are encouraged to 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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