



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

**EIGHT BROOKLYN INDIVIDUALS CHARGED WITH MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR
COVID-19 RELIEF FRAUD**

***Defendants Allegedly Obtained \$2 Million by Submitting
Fraudulent Claims for Unemployment Benefits***

A criminal complaint was unsealed today in federal court in Brooklyn charging Bryan Abraham, Carlos Vazquez, Angel Cabrera, Armani Miller, Johan Santos, Gianni Stewart, Andre Ruddock and Seth Golding with conspiracy to commit access device fraud in connection with a scheme to obtain millions of dollars in unemployment insurance benefits funded, in whole or in part, by COVID-19 pandemic assistance programs. Six defendants were arrested this morning and will make their initial appearance this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Ramon E. Reyes. Miller and Santos remain at large.

Mark J. Lesko, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; Philip R. Bartlett, Inspector-in-Charge, United States Postal Inspection Service, New York Division (USPIS); Nikitas Splagounias, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, New York Region (DOL-OIG); and Roberta Reardon, Commissioner, New York State Department of Labor (NYS DOL), announced the arrests and charges.

“As alleged, the defendants not only fraudulently obtained \$2 million in pandemic-related unemployment benefits using information from third-party victims, they audaciously displayed the proceeds of their fraud – large amounts of stolen cash – on social media,” stated Acting United States Attorney Lesko. “This Office will not hesitate to bring the full weight of the law against defendants who would pocket public funds that are intended to alleviate the hardship of others.” Mr. Lesko also expressed his grateful appreciation to the New York City Police Department for their assistance during the investigation.

“Unfortunately, as the government rolled out various CARES Act programs, fraudsters were ‘At the Ready’ to take full advantage of these programs through a variety of fraud schemes, ripping off the American public of millions in taxpayer dollars, and clogging the

system for those who honestly are in need. These arrests are an example of the commitment of law enforcement to bring those to justice for scamming the system” stated USPIS Inspector-in-Charge Bartlett.

“An important mission of the Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations relating to pandemic-related unemployment benefits. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of allegations,” stated DOL-OIG Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Splagounias.

“There is never an excuse to knowingly commit fraud and steal from a system that was designed to help New Yorkers in a time of need,” stated NYS DOL Commissioner Reardon. “However, it’s even more despicable when these thieves steal a lifeline from New Yorkers in the midst of a public health pandemic. We have no tolerance for criminals, and if you break the law, you will be held accountable. I commend our partners in the U.S. Attorney’s Office and all levels of law enforcement for their commitment to helping us fight Unemployment Insurance fraud.”

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress has enacted laws to establish programs and provide additional funding for unemployment insurance benefits for unemployed persons. These include the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), signed into law on March 27, 2020, which created programs for pandemic unemployment assistance and federal pandemic unemployment compensation.

As alleged in the complaint, between June 2020 and April 2021, the defendants submitted fraudulent claims to the New York State Department of Labor for unemployment insurance benefits. They used the personal identifying information of third-party victims to fraudulently receive unemployment insurance benefits funded, in whole or in part, by COVID-19 pandemic assistance programs. The defendants’ scheme allegedly resulted in approximately \$2 million in unemployment benefits being distributed to the defendants and others. Cabrera, Golding, Stewart and Vazquez posted photos of themselves on social media in which they were holding and fanning out large sums of cash.

The charges in the complaint are allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The government’s case is being handled by the Office’s General Crimes Section. Assistant United States Attorney Tara McGrath is in charge of the prosecution with assistance from Assistant United States Attorney Brendan G. King of the Office’s Asset Forfeiture Section.

The Defendants:

BRYAN ABRAHAM
Age: 18
Brooklyn, New York

CARLOS VASQUEZ
Age: 20

Brooklyn, New York

ANGEL CABRERA

Age: 18

Brooklyn, New York

ARMANI MILLER

Age: 24

Brooklyn, New York

JOHAN SANTOS

Age: 19

Brooklyn, New York

GIANNI STEWART

Age: 19

Brooklyn, New York

ANDRE RUDDOCK

Age: 25

Brooklyn, New York

SETH GOLDING

Age: 18

Brooklyn, New York

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