

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Western District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Buffalo Woman Pleads Guilty To COVID Fraud

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BUFFALO, N.Y. - U.S. Attorney James P. Kennedy, Jr. announced today that Shaneesha White, 25, of Buffalo, NY, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Lawrence J. Vilardo to wire fraud involving benefits connected to a presidentially declared national emergency. The charges carry a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison and a \$1,000,000 fine.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Kyle P. Rossi, who is handling the case, stated that between June 2020 and February 2021, the defendant defrauded the New York State Department of Labor by fraudulently collecting unemployment insurance benefits, to which she was not entitled. White applied for and received benefits in her own name, under false and fraudulent pretenses. The defendant and others also used the personal identifying information of two individuals fraudulently to create benefit accounts and collect benefits in the names of these individuals. The benefit money was deposited into bank accounts held and controlled by the defendant at Key Bank. Key Bank also issued ATM cards in both the White's name and in the names of the two individuals, which the defendant used to make cash withdrawals of the benefits. As a result of the fraud, the defendant unlawfully collected \$48,833.15 in benefits.

The CARES Act is a federal law enacted on March 29, 2020, designed to provide emergency financial assistance to the millions of Americans who are suffering the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It expands states' ability to provide unemployment insurance for many workers impacted by COVID-19, including for workers who are not ordinarily eligible for benefits. The CARES Act provided for three new UI programs: Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA); Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC); and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC).

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 Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

The plea is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations – Labor Racketeering and Fraud, New York Region, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Jonathan Mellone; the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Todd Allen; the U.S. Secret Service, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Jeffrey Burr; and the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge John F. Grasso.

Sentencing is scheduled for January 14, 2022, before Judge Vilardo.

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Topic(s):
Coronavirus

Component(s):
USAO - New York, Western

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