

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of Maryland

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, February 6, 2023

Hyattsville Man Pleads Guilty to Scheme to Fraudulently Obtain at Least \$1.3 Million in COVID-19 CARES Act Benefits

Baltimore, Maryland – Gladstone Njokem, age 36, of Hyattsville, Maryland, pleaded guilty on February 3, 2023, to federal charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft, in connection with a scheme to fraudulently obtain more than \$1.3 million in COVID-19 CARES Act unemployment insurance (UI) benefits.

The guilty plea was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Erek L. Barron; Postal Inspector in Charge Damon E. Wood of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service - Washington Division; Acting Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer, of the National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG); Special Agent in Charge James C. Harris of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Baltimore; and Special Agent in Charge Andrea Peacock of the U.S. Department of the Treasury - Office of Inspector General.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (“CARES”) Act was a federal law enacted in March 2020 to provide emergency financial assistance to Americans suffering from the economic effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It expanded states’ ability to provide UI for many workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including for workers who are not ordinarily eligible for unemployment benefits.

According to his guilty plea, from February 2020 through February 2021, Njokem, co-defendants, Martin Tabe and Sylvester Atekwane, and others conspired to impersonate victims in order to obtain money, including by submitting fraudulent claims for UI benefits. Njokem and his co-conspirators collected the personally identifiable information (PII) of victims, without the victims’ knowledge or consent, then shared the PII amongst themselves and with others to facilitate the fraud and then used the victims’ PII to submit fraudulent applications for UI benefits in Maryland, Arizona, District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Tennessee, and Virginia.

In total, at least \$1,313,325 in UI benefits, applied for using the names and PII of over 183 victims, are traceable to Njokem’s conspiracy based on common IP addresses, mailing addresses and/or email addresses used for the fraudulent UI claims.

Njokem and the government have agreed that, if the Court accepts the plea agreement, Njokem will be sentenced to between 24 and 70 months in federal prison. U.S. District Judge Richard D. Bennett has scheduled sentencing for May 17, 2023 at 11:00 a.m.

Co-defendants Martin Tabe, age 34, of Bowie, Maryland and Sylvester Atekwane, age 33, of Hyattsville, Maryland previously pleaded guilty to their roles in the fraud scheme. Judge Bennett has scheduled sentencing for Atekwane on April 13, 2023 at 11:00 a.m. and for Tabe on May 2, 2023 at 11:00 a.m.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods,

augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.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: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

United States Attorney Erik L. Barron commended the USPIS, the DOL-OIG, HSI, and the U.S. Department of the Treasury – OIG for their work in the investigation. Mr. Barron thanked the Prince George's County Police Department, the Baltimore County Police Department, and the Maryland Department of Labor for their assistance. Mr. Barron also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sean R. Delaney and Darryl L. Tarver, who are prosecuting the federal case.

For more information on the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to help the community, please visit www.justice.gov/usao/md.

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Topic(s):

Coronavirus
Financial Fraud

Component(s):

[USAO - Maryland](#)

Contact:

Marcia Lubin (410) 209-4854

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