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NIGERIAN NATIONAL PLEADS GUILTY TO A COVID-19 UNEMPLOYMENT FRAUD SCHEME AND AN UNRELATED ELDER FRAUD SCHEME

Defendant Listed an At-Home Care Patient's Address to Received Fraudulently Obtained Unemployment Funds; Participated in an Elder Fraud Scheme That Defrauded 13 Victims

Greenbelt, Maryland – Oluwaseyi Akinyemi, a/k/a “Paddy Linkin”, a/k/a “Joseph Kadin”, age 35, of Hyattsville, Maryland, pleaded guilty today to two counts of mail fraud relating to a social media advanced fee fraud scheme that targeted elderly victims.

The guilty plea was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Erek L. Barron; Acting Special Agent in Charge Troy Springer, of the Washington Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General; Special Agent in Charge James R. Mancuso of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Baltimore; and Chief Malik Aziz of the Prince George's County Police Department.

“This office will prosecute anyone misusing this pandemic crisis to line their own pockets,” said U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland Erek L. Barron. “Akinyemi not only took fraudulent advantage of a nursing care patient, a national health crisis, and an employment crisis, but he also caused significant financial harm to 13 elderly victims.”

According to his guilty plea, from July 10, 2018 to April 29, 2019, Akinyemi and at least one co-conspirator conspired to engage in a social media based elder fraud scheme. Members of the conspiracy targeted elderly victims on social media platforms, impersonating accounts of the victim's friends in order to vouch for their fraudulent financial scheme and convince the victim to send money in hopes of receiving a financial reward. Within the scheme to defraud, the conspiracy members presented themselves as agents of real and fictitious government programs that offered supposed financial benefits to qualifying individuals.

Once the victims demonstrated interest, other members of the conspiracy utilized a new account or persona to represent themselves as an agent of an agency or community fund. The victim was then instructed to send money in a mail service system to the agency for “taxes and fees.” Believing that they would receive a financial reward, the victims sent cash, money orders, gift cards, and other valuable items through mail services to Akinyemi as well as other members of the conspiracy in order to obtain a financial reward. Akinyemi received packages under the aliases of Paddy Linkin,” “Flex,” “Joseph Kadin,” and “Anna Marcos,” in addition to other aliases. After receiving the fraudulently obtained funds, Akinyemi delivered the fraudulently obtained cash to co-conspirators in Nigeria.

Victim 1, who was 78 years old and lived in Texas, received an application via social media to apply to a purported federal government grant program. The application was accompanied by a message from a person whom Victim 1 believed was a friend, vouching for the program. Victim 1 was told by members of the conspiracy that he had been approved for \$100,000 in grant funds, but that in order to receive the grant funds Victim 1 needed to pay taxes. Victim 1 sent multiple packages of money, including to Akinyemi. In order to induce Victim 1 to continue to send money, members of the conspiracy sent Victim 1 electronic “certificates.” One of these certificates was a “Certificate of Completion” bearing the Internal Revenue Service seal, stating that it was from the “Federal and State Tax Institutes.” Victim 1 also received a certificate with a U.S. flag on it with the words “Federal Grants” next to it which included Victim 1’s full name and the text: “Federal Government Grants for the sum of \$5,000,000.” After receiving these certificates, Victim 1 continued to send money to Akinyemi and other members of the conspiracy. In total, Victim 1 sent between approximately \$70,000 to \$80,000 to Akinyemi.

Victim 2, who was 71 years old and lived in Indiana, received a message from someone they believed to be a high school friend regarding a “Strengthening Community Fund.” In reality, a member of the conspiracy was posing as the victim’s high school friend. Ultimately, the conspiracy member told Victim 2 that they received money from the fund in the recent past and that there were different amounts for which a person could apply. The member of the conspiracy then provided Victim 2 with the contact information for a fictitious agent representing the “Fund.”

After Victim 2 contacted and sought information regarding the Fund, a member of the conspiracy masquerading as an agent asked Victim 2 if they were ready to apply. When Victim 2 communicated their desire to do so, the member of the conspiracy sought biographical information from Victim 2, including their monthly income. Once Victim 2 provided this information, the member of the conspiracy informed Victim 2 that they had been “approved.” Victim 2 applied for \$80,000, which Victim 2 believed would cost \$800 in fees. Victim 2 then sent approximately \$50,000 in fictitious fees and taxes in order to obtain money from the fictitious fund.

Victim 3, who was 69 years old, sent \$9,720 to Akinyemi based on instructions from a member of the conspiracy. Victim 3 received a check in the mail for \$9,770 that she was instructed to cash. The victim then deposited the check into her bank account and subsequently sent the funds to Akinyemi’s Landover Residence, as instructed. The check sent to Victim 3 was issued by Company 1 located in Tacoma, Washington. Company 1 was the victim of a fraud scheme that caused several unauthorized fraudulent checks to be generated and issued on behalf of Company 1.

Law enforcement’s subsequent review of Akinyemi’s phone revealed communications of Akinyemi discussing receipt of these funds from Company 1 through Victim 3. The chat conversation contained Akinyemi’s Landover Residence, his alias (“Paddy Linkin”), a mail service tracking number, and a dollar amount. Akinyemi and the co-conspirator also discussed the percentage of the proceeds that Akinyemi would take as part of his participation in the conspiracy.

During an interview with law enforcement on April 15, 2019, Akinyemi confirmed that he had received packages from victims throughout the country, detailed the scheme to defraud, and informed investigators that individuals in Nigeria were responsible for soliciting the victims to send money to him. Further, Akinyemi stated that he received approximately \$80,000 in the mail in the year prior to his interview.

As part of the scheme to defraud elder victims, Akinyemi and his co-conspirators defrauded at least 13 victims, caused significant financial hardship to victims, and caused a loss of at least \$478,145.07.

In an unrelated scheme, Akinyemi and other co-conspirators illegally obtained unemployment and COVID-19 related benefits by filing fraudulent unemployment claims under the names of living and deceased victims.

Throughout the scheme, Akinyemi and his co-conspirators used his Landover, Maryland residence as the mailing address for the fraudulent unemployment insurance debit cards. Additionally, the conspiracy listed the home address of a Washington D.C. client whom Akinyemi provided at-home nursing care in order to receive the fraudulently obtained funds in the mail.

As stated in his plea agreement, 10 Maryland Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (“PUA”) claims were filed with the state of Maryland totaling an intended loss of more than \$170,000.

As a result of an executed search warrant on April 15, 2021 at Akinyemi’s Hyattsville, Maryland residence, law enforcement found two unemployment insurance debit cards in the names of Victim 24 and Victim 25. The unemployment insurance claims for Victims 24 and 25 were filed using the address of Akinyemi’s D.C. nursing care client.

In total, Akinyemi and his co-conspirators used the identities of 19 real individuals to file fraudulent unemployment insurance and PUA claims, caused an actual loss of more than \$7,000, and projected an intended loss of \$250,000 in state and federal benefits.

Akinyemi faces maximum 20 years in federal prison for each count of mail fraud followed by up to three years of supervised release. U.S. District Judge Theodore D. Chuang has scheduled sentencing for April 11, 2022 at 11 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>.

The [Pandemic Response Accountability Committee \(PRAC\)](#) Fraud Task Force was established to serve the American public by promoting transparency and facilitating coordinated oversight of the federal government’s COVID-19 pandemic response. The PRAC Fraud Task Force brings together agents from its 22 member Inspectors General to investigate fraud involving a variety of programs, including the Paycheck Protection Program. Task force agents who are detailed to the PRAC receive expanded authority to investigate pandemic fraud as well as tools and training to support their investigations.

The Department of Justice runs the National Elder Fraud Hotline at 1-833-FRAUD-11 (1-833-372-8311), has an [interactive tool](#) for elders who have been financially exploited to help determine to which agency they should report their incident, and also a [senior scam alert website](#). Victims are encouraged to file a complaint online with the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center at this [website](#) or by calling 1-800-225-5324. Elder fraud complaints may be filed with the FTC at

www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov or at 877-FTC-HELP.

United States Attorney Ereik L. Barron commended the HSI, DOL-OIG, and the Prince George's County Police Department for their work in the investigation. Mr. Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Rajeev R. Raghavan, who is prosecuting the 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 and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>.

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