

PRESS RELEASE

Siblings Convicted, Sentenced in Federal Court for COVID Relief Fraud

Friday, May 19, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Mississippi

Jackson, Miss. – A Brandon woman was sentenced to two years of probation for theft of unemployment insurance benefits related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and her brother was convicted of conspiring with her to commit wire fraud in obtaining these benefits.

U.S. Attorney Darren J. LaMarca, Mississippi State Auditor Shad White, and Special Agent in Charge Mathew Broadhurst of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Southeast Region made the announcement.

According to court documents and statements made in court, Aubrey D. Martinez assisted her brother, John Evans, Jr., in applying for benefits with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security. As an inmate in the Mississippi Department of Corrections, Evans was not entitled to receive unemployment insurance benefits. Evans is serving a 20-year sentence in MDOC custody for armed robbery and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

The unemployment insurance benefits were federally subsidized through the CARES Act in response to the pandemic.

Her brother, John Evans, is scheduled to be sentenced on August 21, 2023, and faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The pair will be required to pay restitution in the amount of \$10,732.

The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General and the Mississippi Office of the State Auditor investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Kimberly T. Purdie is prosecuting the case.

This case is being prosecuted as part of the Department of Justice's National Unemployment Insurance Fraud Task Force (NUIFTF). In response to the unprecedented scope of Unemployment Insurance (UI) fraud, the Department of Justice established the NUIFTF. The NUIFTF is a prosecutor-led multi-agency task force with representatives from FBI, DOL-OIG, IRS-CI, HSI, DHS-OIG, USPIA, USSS, SSA-OIG, FDIC-OIG, and other agencies. Members of the NUIFTF are working with state workforce agencies, financial institutions, and other law enforcement partners across the country to fight UI fraud, and consumers should be vigilant in light of these threats and take the appropriate steps to safeguard themselves.

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. One source of relief provided by the CARES Act is the authorization that expands states' ability to provide unemployment insurance for many workers impacted by COVID-19, including for workers who are not ordinarily eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

Anyone with information about 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>.

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