

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 8, 2021

Wise County Man Pleads Guilty to Unemployment Fraud Scheme

ABINGDON, Va.- Travis Kilgore, a Wise, Va., man who conspired to file for fraudulent pandemic unemployment benefits, pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in Abingdon to charges he conspired with others to commit mail fraud and defraud the government of more than \$182,474, Acting United States Attorney Daniel P. Bubar and Jonathan Mellone, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, Philadelphia Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General announced today.

Kilgore, 34, waived his right to be indicted and pleaded guilty today to a two-count Information charging him with one count of conspiracy to defraud the government and one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud.

“During a worldwide pandemic, Kilgore and his co-conspirators defrauded the government and stole funds targeted to help the most vulnerable in society, who had lost their jobs,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Bubar today. “I am grateful for the Department of Labor and our state partners, whose hard work brought Kilgore to justice, and demonstrate the importance of the integrity of these vital programs.”

“Pandemic unemployment insurance benefits provide needed assistance to qualified individuals who suffered a loss of employment due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The defendant and his co-conspirators took advantage of this program by lying about their eligibility when filing for Pandemic unemployment insurance for themselves and others. The Office of Inspector General will continue to work diligently with the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Virginia Employment Commission, and our law enforcement partners to protect the integrity of the unemployment insurance system from those who choose to exploit the program” said Jonathan Mellone, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, Philadelphia Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

Kilgore admitted today that he, and others, developed a scheme beginning in May 2020 to defraud the United States and the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) through the filing of fraudulent claims for pandemic unemployment benefits.

According to court documents, Kilgore and others filed claims for pandemic unemployment benefits through the VEC website. The scheme involved submitting claims for various individuals, including Kilgore and others, who were not eligible to receive pandemic unemployment benefits. Kilgore lied on the filings as part of the scheme to appear eligible for benefits. Because pandemic unemployment benefits were paid weekly, Kilgore reverified and re-certified the false statements on numerous occasions throughout the scheme.

In all, Kilgore filed claims for approximately 21 other individuals, causing at least \$182,474 in false claims to be have been paid.

The investigation of the case was conducted by the Department of Labor-Office of the Inspector General and the Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation, the Norton Police Department,

and the Russell County Sheriff's Office. Assistant United States Attorney Daniel J. Murphy is prosecuting the case for the United States.

Component(s):

USAO - Virginia, Western