

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
EASTERN DISTRICT *of* VIRGINIA

[U.S. Attorneys](#) » [Eastern District of Virginia](#) » [News](#)

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, July 21, 2022

Three Individuals Plead Guilty to Fraudulently Obtaining Pandemic Unemployment Benefits for Virginia Prison Inmates

RICHMOND, Va. – Three individuals pleaded guilty to participating in a conspiracy to use the personal identifying information (PII) of Virginia prison inmates in order to fraudulently obtain COVID-19 pandemic-related unemployment benefits.

According to court documents, Veldreka L. Crockett, 31, of Hopewell, pleaded guilty today, the last of the three defendants in the conspiracy to enter a guilty plea. Crockett was an employee of a company contracted by the Commonwealth of Virginia to provide services related to the Commonwealth's management of its Medicaid program. In this capacity, Crockett worked to determine the Medicaid eligibility of incarcerated individuals in the Commonwealth.

At the same time, in 2020 and 2021, Crockett conspired with at least two other inmates at Virginia correctional institutions – Clarence Stith III, 38, of Lawrenceville Correctional Center in Lawrenceville, and Andre C. Mason, Jr., 35, of Greensville Correctional Center in Jarratt – to collect the PII of other Virginia inmates. After receiving the inmate information from her co-defendants, Crockett used it to file pandemic unemployment claims on behalf of at least 30 inmates with the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). The defendants caused the VEC to disburse approximately \$318,727 in fraudulent pandemic-related unemployment benefits. The VEC was able to reclaim \$25,920 of the disbursed funds after discovering the fraud.

In order for the claims to be successful, Crockett and her co-conspirators included numerous false statements about the inmates' addresses, last employers, and employment statuses, including that they were unable to work because of the pandemic. In truth, the inmates could not work and did not qualify for unemployment benefits because they were incarcerated. Crockett and her co-conspirators also filed weekly re-certifications for unemployment claims to ensure that the VEC would continue to pay benefits. Such UI claims caused the VEC to create and send pre-paid debit cards in the name of the Virginia inmates to addresses designated by Crockett and her co-conspirators.

Crockett coordinated with Stith and Mason to ensure that Crockett would receive the pre-paid debit cards in the name of Virginia inmates so that Crockett could take a portion of the funds. As part of the scheme,

Crockett also transferred funds from these pre-paid debit cards to Stith via Stith's prison commissary account and to individuals designated by Mason.

Crockett pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit mail fraud and aggravated identity theft. She faces a maximum sentence of 32 years in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of two years when sentenced on October 20. Stith pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit mail fraud and aggravated identity theft. He faces a maximum sentence of 32 years in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of two years when sentenced on October 20. Mason pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit mail fraud. He faces a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison when sentenced on October 13. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after taking into account the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Jessica D. Aber, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, and Joseph V. Cuffari, Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security, made the announcement after U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark R. Colombell accepted the plea.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Avi Panth is prosecuting the case.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case Nos. 3:22-cr-32.

Topic(s):

Coronavirus

Financial Fraud

Component(s):

[USAO - Virginia, Eastern](#)

Contact:

USAVAE.Press@usdoj.gov

Updated July 21, 2022