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Eastern District of California

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Final Defendant Sentenced to 6 Years in Prison for Defrauding the Social Security Administration

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Darron Dimitri Ross, 36, of Charlotte, North Carolina, was sentenced today to six years in prison and \$696,912 in restitution for conspiracy to defraud the United States, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft, U.S. Attorney Phillip A. Talbert announced.

"Ross and his co-defendants committed a brazen fraud scheme that targeted over 200 people receiving Social Security benefits," said U.S. Attorney Talbert. "Today's sentence sends a strong message that we will not tolerate exploitation of government benefit programs."

"Mr. Ross conspired with a former Social Security Administration (SSA) employee and others to use personally identifiable information stolen from SSA records to commit identity theft against beneficiaries to obtain their funds. This was an egregious crime, and his role was unconscionable," said Gail S. Ennis, Inspector General for SSA. "This sentence holds him accountable for his actions and for restitution to those harmed. We will continue to protect the integrity of SSA programs from those who seek to defraud taxpayers. I thank the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General and the FBI for their valuable assistance in this investigation and the U.S. Attorney's Office for prosecuting this case."

According to court documents, between November 2015 and October 2018, Ross and co-defendants Eric Lemoyne Willis, 46, of West Sacramento, and Joshua Bilal George, 39, of San Diego, conspired to commit fraud and steal public money from the Social Security Administration (SSA). During the conspiracy and fraud scheme, Willis worked as an SSA Operations Supervisor in Sacramento and Lodi. George was a federal law enforcement officer with the Federal Protective Service and was responsible for coordinating security at various federal buildings in California including some used by the SSA. Ross resided in Charlotte, North Carolina, and knew George because they were childhood friends.

According to court documents, Willis used his authority as an SSA employee to access the confidential Social Security records of numerous Social Security beneficiaries. These records contained personally identifiable information (PII) including names, addresses, Social Security numbers, dates of birth, account numbers, family information, and benefit payment amounts. Willis would seek out PII for beneficiaries who used direct deposit for payment of large benefits. Under the terms of the defendants' conspiracy, Willis then transferred this PII to Ross who in turn transferred some of it to George for use in the fraud scheme.

Ross and George's roles in these crimes included calling numerous SSA field offices across the country and using the stolen PII to impersonate the beneficiaries. Ross also opened at least 44 online bank accounts under fraudulent identities to receive diverted SSA benefit payments. If Ross succeeded in convincing an SSA representative that he was the beneficiary, he would request that the beneficiary's direct deposit account be changed to one of the conspirators' fraudulent accounts. The SSA then deposited benefit payments into the fraudulent account. The defendants then withdrew the funds at ATMs and spent additional funds using debit cards associated with the accounts. Ross also transferred much of the stolen proceeds to co-conspirators for their participation in these crimes. Once the SSA became aware that a particular victim was the target of this fraud, it stopped depositing benefit payments to the fraudulent account.

The SSA has identified more than 200 beneficiaries nationwide who were targeted by these crimes, and it suffered at least \$696,912 in losses caused by the defendants' offenses. The defendants spent the proceeds of their crimes on, among other things, vacation trips and luxury items.

This case was the product of an investigation by the Social Security Administration – Office of the Inspector General, the Department of Homeland Security – Office of the Inspector General, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert J. Artuz prosecuted the case.

On July 6, 2022, Willis was sentenced to four years in prison, and on Aug. 22, 2022, George was sentenced to six months in prison to be followed by 12 months of home confinement.

Topic(s):

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Component(s):

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