

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
DISTRICT *of* CONNECTICUT

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**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of Connecticut

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, November 30, 2022

## **Waterbury Man Charged with Theft of Pandemic Unemployment Benefits**

Vanessa Roberts Avery, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, announced that OLAJUWON HARRINGTON, also known as "OJ Harrington," 30, of Waterbury, was arrested today on a federal criminal complaint charging him with fraud and identity theft offenses related to his alleged theft of pandemic unemployment benefits.

Harrington appeared today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert M. Spector in New Haven and was released on a \$50,000 bond.

As alleged in court documents, in March 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act ("CARES Act") was signed into law. The CARES Act created a new temporary federal unemployment insurance program for pandemic unemployment assistance ("Pandemic Unemployment Assistance"). Pandemic Unemployment Assistance provided unemployment insurance ("UI") benefits for employed individuals who are not eligible for other types of UI due to their employment status. The CARES Act also created a new temporary federal program called Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation ("FPUC") that provided additional weekly benefits to those eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance or regular UI. The Connecticut Department of Labor (CT-DOL) administers UI benefits for residents of Connecticut.

It is alleged that, using identifying information of real persons ("victims") without their knowledge, Harrington and/or others submitted to CT-DOL numerous fraudulent applications for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. Relying on the applications, CT-DOL awarded unemployment assistance in the form of debit cards in the names of the victims and mailed the debit cards to addresses provided in the applications. Thereafter, Harrington obtained the debit cards issued in victims' names and unlawfully used the cards for his own benefit.

The complaint charges Harrington with access device fraud, an offense that carries a maximum term of imprisonment of 15 years, and aggravated identify theft, an offense that carries a mandatory consecutive sentence of two years.

U.S. Attorney Avery stressed that a complaint is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. Charges are only allegations, and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

This investigation is being conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General; U.S. Department of Homeland Security – Office of Inspector General; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Social Security Administration – Office of Inspector General and the Connecticut Department of Labor. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher W. Schmeisser.

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**Topic(s):**

Coronavirus

Financial Fraud

Identity Theft

**Component(s):**

USAO - Connecticut

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