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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of Georgia

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Woman pleads guilty to scamming SSA and FEMA out of hundreds of thousands of dollars

ATLANTA - Ivie Shevon Sajere pled guilty to a money laundering conspiracy that defrauded the Social Security Administration ("SSA") and the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") out of nearly \$1,000,000. The conspiracy involved the false filing of thousands of online applications for SSA retirement benefits and FEMA disaster benefits using stolen personal information.

"This was a massive fraud that impacted two government agencies and harmed thousands of victims across the country," said U.S. Attorney Kurt R. Erskine. "The defendant thought she could avoid detection because the scheme was so complex. She was wrong. Through the coordination with multiple federal law enforcement agencies, we were able to identify Sajere and bring her to justice."

"Sajere and her co-conspirators, brazenly used the stolen personal information of innocent people and abused SSA's online application process to defraud the government of nearly a million dollars," said Gail S. Ennis, Inspector General for the Social Security Administration. "This guilty plea demonstrates the commitment we have to ensuring the integrity of SSA's eServices and to work with our law enforcement partners to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes. I appreciate the coordinated efforts of the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, and U.S. Postal Investigation Services, and other law enforcement partners, in working with us to dismantle this conspiracy."

"Funds fraudulently obtained from FEMA and the SSA deprive deserving recipients and communities truly in need," said Dr. Joseph V. Cuffari, Inspector General for DHS's Office of Inspector General. "This outcome and guilty plea speaks to the strength of the successful law enforcement partnerships between the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, the Department of Justice, the Social Security Administration and the U.S. Postal Investigation Services."

"In partnership with our law enforcement partners, we combined our investigative and legal resources to stop this fraudulent activity that affected numerous identity theft victims along with two government agencies that provide aid to those in need," said Tommy D. Coke, Inspector in Charge of the Atlanta Division. "Postal Inspectors are dedicated to protecting the mail from all those who seek to use the mail system for illegal purposes and this case should serve as warning to anyone considering similar conduct that those actions will result in criminal consequences."

According to U.S. Attorney Erskine, the charges and other information presented in court: Beginning in approximately June 2017 until September 2018, the defendant and her husband, Neville Sajere, both Nigerian nationals who engaged in marriage fraud in an unsuccessful attempt to become US citizens, participated in a money laundering scheme that defrauded nearly a million dollars from SSA and FEMA.

The scheme involved unknown individuals filing applications for Social Security retirement benefits and/or FEMA disaster relief benefits using stolen personal information. The individual victims whose personal information was stolen were often individuals highly acclaimed in their fields. It appears that these individuals were targeted because, even though they were of retirement age, they had not filed for SSA retirement benefits and did not need disaster benefit relief. Thus, the criminals had a better chance of getting the applications approved. Specifically, the victims included a movie director, an award-winning journalist, the daughter of a legendary movie director, and a highly esteemed academic.

Once an application was approved, the fraudsters directed that the funds be deposited onto a Green Dot debit card opened using other stolen personal information. As soon as the money was credited to the Green Dot debit card, the defendant generated payments through Square, Stripe and Paypal to Nevada Bridge TV, a Nigerian streaming service/television production company owned by the defendant's husband; BAGMA, an African gospel award show business owned by the defendant's husband; and Shevonz, a clothing store owned by the defendant.

Sajere pleaded guilty to one count of violating Title 18, United States Code, Section 1956(h) (conspiracy to commit money laundering.) She also agreed to pay \$949,616.40 in restitution to SSA and FEMA.

Sentencing for Ivie Shevon Sajere, 37, of Suwanee, Georgia, is scheduled for March 8, 2022, at 10:30 a.m., before U.S. District Judge Timothy C. Batten Sr.

This case is being investigated by the Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, and U.S. Postal Investigation Services.

Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Diane C. Schulman, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Samir Kaushal are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

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