



JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Eight Individuals Charged in Alleged \$30 Million Unemployment Benefits Scheme

Charges were unsealed today against eight individuals for conspiring to defraud the Georgia Department of Labor of tens of millions of dollars in federal funds intended for unemployment benefits.

Seven defendants have been indicted and one defendant has already pleaded guilty for her role in the scheme.

According to court documents, Tyshion Nautese Hicks, 30, of Vienna, Georgia; Shatara Hubbard, 34, of Warner Robins, Georgia; Torella Wynn, 30, of Cordele, Georgia; Macovian Doston, 29, of Vienna; Kenya Whitehead, 35, of Cordele; A'Darrion Alexander, 27, of Warner Robins; Membrish Brown, 27, of Vienna; and Edith Nate Hicks, 45, of Atlanta, Georgia and others allegedly caused more than 5,000 fraudulent unemployment insurance (UI) claims to be filed with the Georgia Department of Labor (GaDOL), resulting in at least \$30 million in stolen benefits meant to assist unemployed individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To execute the scheme, the defendants and others allegedly created fictitious employers and fabricated lists of purported employees using stolen personally identifiable information (PII) from thousands of identity theft victims and filed fraudulent unemployment insurance claims on the GaDOL website. The defendants allegedly stole PII from a variety of sources, including by paying defendant Edith Nate Hicks, an employee of an Atlanta-area health care and hospital network, to unlawfully obtain patients' PII from the hospital's databases. The defendants also allegedly caused the stolen UI funds to be disbursed via prepaid debit cards mailed to addresses of their choice, many of which were in and around Cordele and Vienna.

Tyshion Nautese Hicks, Hubbard, Wynn, Doston, Whitehead, Alexander, and Brown are each charged by indictment with conspiracy to commit mail fraud, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Tyshion Nautese Hicks and Doston are also charged with aggravated identity theft, which carries a mandatory two-year prison sentence that must be imposed consecutively with any other sentence. Alexander is also charged with money laundering, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

Edith Nate Hicks was charged by criminal information with conspiracy to commit mail fraud and pleaded guilty to this offense on Nov. 15. According to her plea agreement, Hicks unlawfully used her employer's patient databases to steal PII for the unemployment fraud scheme in exchange for payments via Chime, Venmo, and CashApp. She unlawfully accessed at least 1,600 Atlanta-area patients' PII during the conspiracy. Hicks faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. A sentencing date has not been scheduled.

As to all defendants, a federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division; U.S. Attorney Peter D. Leary for the Middle District of Georgia; Special Agent in Charge Mathew Broadhurst of the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), Atlanta Region; Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari of the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS-OIG); Resident Agent in Charge Clint Bush of the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) Albany, Georgia Office; Inspector in Charge Eric Shen of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) Criminal Investigations Group; Special Agent in Charge Katrina Berger of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Georgia; Special Agent in Charge Scott Pierce of the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (USPS-OIG) Southern Area Field Office; and Special Agent in Charge James E. Dorsey of the IRS Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) made the announcement.

The DOL-OIG, DHS-OIG, USSS, USPIS, HSI, USPS-OIG, and IRS-CI are investigating the case.

Trial Attorneys Lyndie Freeman, Matt Kahn, and Siji Moore of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section are prosecuting the case, with valuable assistance from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Georgia.

If you believe you are a victim in this case, please contact the Fraud Section's Victim Witness Unit toll-free at (888) 549-3945 or by email at victimassistance.fraud@usdoj.gov. You are also encouraged to visit our webpage for this case at <http://www.justice.gov/criminal-vns/case/united-states-v-tyshion-nautese-hicks-et-al>.

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Topic(s):

Financial Fraud

Component(s):Criminal DivisionCriminal - Criminal Fraud SectionUSAO - Georgia, Middle