



PRESS RELEASE

Former Saratoga County Resident Sentenced for Money Laundering Conspiracy

Wednesday, February 1, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of New York

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Christopher L. Vandermark, age 57, formerly of Gansevoort, New York, now a resident of Endicott, New York, was sentenced today to 5 years of probation following his guilty plea to a money laundering conspiracy designed to conceal proceeds from a multi-state unemployment insurance fraud scheme.

United States Attorney Carla B. Freedman and John Pias, Special Agent in Charge of the Detroit Field Office of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General (DHS-OIG), made the announcement.

At the time of his guilty plea, Vandermark admitted to corresponding via online messages for over a year with a co-conspirator who represented herself to be a woman living in North Carolina. The co-conspirator directed Vandermark to open accounts at multiple financial institutions, as well as provide her with routing details for his existing accounts. From June 2020 through early April 2021, Vandermark's accounts received transfers of more than \$88,000 in fraudulently obtained unemployment insurance benefits from six states. Vandermark purchased hundreds of gift cards from local retailers using the benefits, photographed the identifying numbers on the cards, and sent the photographs to the co-conspirator. After Vandermark provided the identifying numbers, the co-conspirator could sell the gift cards online as part of an effort to conceal the original source of the funds.

Vandermark admitted that he received and ignored multiple warnings from multiple financial institutions that his actions furthered an unemployment insurance fraud scheme. Additionally, when law enforcement agents interviewed Vandermark regarding approximately \$37,000 in fraudulently obtained unemployment insurance benefits transferred to his account at a local bank, Vandermark falsely denied holding the account and receiving the funds. Following the law enforcement interview, Vandermark opened yet another financial account and received an additional \$13,734 in benefits from three states, which he used to purchase more gift cards that he photographed and sent to his co-conspirator.

Senior United States District Judge Gary L. Sharpe also ordered Vandermark to pay restitution in the amount of \$13,734, and to forfeit the same amount of money as proceeds of his crime.

DHS-OIG investigated the case, with assistance from the Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General and the Office of the New York State Comptroller. Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan S. Reiner prosecuted the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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