

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of New York

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Batavia Woman Arrested, Charged With COVID Fraud

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ROCHESTER, N.Y.- U.S. Attorney James P. Kennedy, Jr. announced today that Danielle Tooley, 36, of Batavia, NY, was arrested and charged by criminal complaint with wire fraud and theft of government funds. The charges carry a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison and a \$1,000,000 fine.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Kyle Rossi, who is handling the case, stated that according to the complaint, between July and December 4, 2020, the defendant and others knowingly used the personal identifying information of other individuals unlawfully to apply for and collect unemployment benefits connected to federal COVID-19 relief programs.

The scheme came to the attention of law enforcement on November 24, 2020, when Tooley was arrested by the New York State Police on charges of criminal possession of a controlled substance during a vehicle traffic stop in Bergen, NY. During the interaction with the defendant, troopers observed a crack pipe with white residue inside of Tooley's vehicle. After the arrest, the defendant's vehicle was searched, and six New York State unemployment benefit cards were recovered. The benefit cards were issued to individuals other than Tooley. The benefit cards were turned over to the Buffalo Field Office of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, for further investigation. A subsequent examination of bank records for the benefit cards revealed several indicators of fraud and video footage from ATMs where the cards were used confirmed that the defendant had consistently withdrawn money from the cards. Tooley routinely used the personal identifying information of others in order to apply for and collect unemployment benefits in their names. In total, the scheme resulted in a loss of at least \$99,141.39 to the United States.

The defendant made an initial appearance before U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark W. Pedersen and was released on conditions.

The criminal complaint is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations – Labor Racketeering and Fraud, New York Region, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Jonathan Mellone; the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Todd Allen; the U.S. Secret Service, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Jeffrey Burr; the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge John F. Grasso; and the New York State Police, under the direction of Major Barry Chase.

The fact that a defendant has been charged with a crime is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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