



Department of Justice

**United States Attorney Andrew Murray
Western District of North Carolina**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2020
<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/ncw>

CONTACT: Lia Bantavani
704-338-3140
lia.bantavani@usdoj.gov

CHARLOTTE MAN INVOLVED IN TWO SEPARATE IDENTITY THEFT SCHEMES PLEADS GUILTY TO FEDERAL CHARGES

In One Scheme, the Defendant Received more than \$189,900 in COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance Benefits, Using Stolen Identities to File Fraudulent Claims in Wisconsin & Arizona

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Jamel Johnson, 30, of Charlotte, appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge David Keesler today, and pleaded guilty to federal charges for his role in two separate schemes involving identity theft, announced Andrew Murray, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina.

Johnson was initially indicted on June 19, 2020, on bank and wire fraud conspiracy and aggravated identity theft charges, for his involvement in a scheme to obtain fraudulent bank loans using stolen personal information of identity theft victims. On September 25, 2020, new federal wire fraud charges were filed against Johnson, for using stolen identities to file for, and receive, COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits.

According to filed court documents and statements made at Johnson's plea hearing today, from August 2019 to June 2020, Johnson and his co-conspirators engaged in a bank loan scheme involving the use of stolen personal identifying information of identity theft victims. Court documents show that, after acquiring the victims' stolen identities on the internet and elsewhere, the co-conspirators used them to attempt to obtain more than \$1,000,000 in fraudulent bank loans and goods.

According to court records, over the course of the investigation into the bank loan scheme, law enforcement discovered that Johnson was also executing a separate scheme involving COVID-19 UI benefits. In this scheme, court records show that, from May 21, 2020 through July 22, 2020, Johnson defrauded the U.S. Department of Labor, the State of Wisconsin, and the State of Arizona, by submitting fraudulent claims for unemployment insurance benefits in the names of identity theft victims. During the relevant time-period, Johnson fraudulently obtained more than \$189,912 in fraudulent UI benefits using the compromised identities of approximately 70 victims. According to court records, Johnson directed that payments of the fraudulent UI benefits be made to Green Dot cards, or to bank accounts under Johnson's control.

Johnson is currently on release pending sentencing. The charge of conspiracy to commit bank and wire fraud carries a maximum prison sentence of 30 years and a \$1 million fine. The aggravated identity theft charge carries a minimum prison term of two years, consecutive to any other prison term imposed, and a \$250,000 fine. The wire fraud charge carries a maximum prison sentence of 20 years and a \$250,000 fine.

One of Johnson's co-defendants in the bank loan scheme, Justin Parks, has also pleaded guilty to bank and wire fraud conspiracy and aggravated identity theft. A sentencing date for Johnson and Parks has not been set. The charges against David Clarke and Mikael Roberts for their alleged involvement in the loan scheme are still pending, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt in a court of law.

In making today's announcement, U.S. Attorney Murray commended the U.S. Postal Inspection Service for their investigative efforts, and thanked the Atlanta Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General, and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department for their invaluable assistance.

The prosecution for the government is handled by Assistant United States Attorney Jenny G. Sugar of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Charlotte.

###