



U.S. Department of Justice

Ronald C. Machen Jr.
*United States Attorney for the
District of Columbia*
Judiciary Center
555 Fourth St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, September 5, 2013

For Information Contact:

Public Affairs

(202) 252-6933

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/dc/index.html>

Fourteen Area People Charged With First-Degree Felony Fraud For Stealing Unemployment Benefits Defendants Submitted Claims Even Though They Were Working

WASHINGTON – Fourteen people from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area have been charged separately with fraudulently obtaining thousands of dollars each in unemployment benefits from the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services. All told, the defendants are alleged to have generated more than \$250,000 in fraudulent benefits.

The charges were announced today by U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr., Bill Jones, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Washington Regional Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations, and Charles J. Willoughby, Inspector General for the District of Columbia.

The defendants, who were arrested today, are charged in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia with first-degree felony fraud. The charge carries a statutory maximum of 10 years in prison and financial penalties.

Each defendant is accused of submitting fraudulent claims for unemployment compensation to the D.C. Department of Employment Services. In fact, according to the charging documents, they were not entitled to the benefits because they were employed. The amounts they received ranged from \$13,343 to \$23,220, the charging documents stated.

“Unemployment benefits provide basic assistance to people who have fallen on hard times while they search for new work,” said U.S. Attorney Machen. “Cheaters who lie to obtain those benefits undermine our ability to help those who are truly in need. The arrests and charges announced today demonstrate our resolve to protect the taxpayer from abuse of critical public programs.”

“Today’s numerous arrests highlight the Office of Inspector General's commitment to safeguarding the Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance Programs. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of alleged schemes,” said Special Agent in Charge Jones.

“I am proud of the role that the District of Columbia Office of the Inspector General has played and continues to play in conjunction with its law enforcement partners in the protection of the District’s fisc as well as in the maintenance of the integrity of District operations,” stated Inspector General Willoughby.

Those charged include: Charlene Adams, 48, of Stafford, Va.; Jeffrey Barton, 46, of Washington, D.C.; Joyce Garnes, 63, of Hyattsville, Md.; Crystal Hamlin, 41, of Washington, D.C.; Alhagi Jabbie, 36, of Silver Spring, Md.; Shaunte Kent, 31, of Middle River, Md.; Laurence Liggins, 46, of Washington, D.C.; Karentina McCoy, 39, of Suitland, Md.; Sean Pettus, 44, of Washington, D.C. ; Donna Queen, 35, of Washington, D.C.; Joseph Sackie, 53, of Silver Spring, Md.; Cherylene Smith, 54, of Suitland, Md.; Erica Smith, 44, of Silver Spring, Md., and Anthony White, 48, of Washington, D.C.

The fraudulent claims covered various time periods, depending on the defendant. Overall, the time-frame includes benefits sought from 2007 through 2012. The amount of fraudulent unemployment benefits alleged in the charging documents varied among defendants:

Adams: \$17,214
Barton: \$18,000
Garnes: \$19,147
Hamlin: \$15,825
Jabbie: \$17,760
Kent: \$19,752
Liggins: \$13,343
McCoy: \$23,220
Pettus: \$20,861
Queen: \$18,203
Sackie: \$16,259
Cherylene Smith: \$17,664
Erica Smith: \$18,052
White: \$17,899

The filing of a criminal charge is merely an allegation that a defendant has committed a violation of criminal laws and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.

The arrests followed an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Inspector General and the District of Columbia Office of the Inspector General This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephanie G. Miller of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia.

13-305

##