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Department of Justice

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District of Maryland

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Serial Fraudster Pleads Guilty to Federal Charges Related to Multiple Fraud Schemes Resulting in Losses of More Than \$1 Million

Fraud included over 220 Identity Theft Victims, More Than \$1 Million in Fraudulently Obtained Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program Benefits, Six Fraudulent Car Loans, and an Attempted Fraudulent COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan Application

Baltimore, Maryland – Robert Lee Snowden Jr., age 45, of Owings Mills, Maryland, pleaded guilty on March 22, 2021, to the federal charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and to aggravated identity theft, in connection with a series of fraud schemes perpetrated between 2013 and 2020.

The guilty plea was announced by Acting United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Jonathan F. Lenzner; Special Agent in Charge Bethanne M. Dinkins of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General; Postal Inspector in Charge Peter R. Rendina of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service - Washington Division; and Inspector General Marva Sutherland of the Office of Inspector General for the Maryland Department of Human Services.

According to his guilty plea, from 2013 to July 16, 2020, Snowden conspired to defraud the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP"), formerly known as the "Food Stamp Program," by using victims' stolen identification information to obtain SNAP benefits. Snowden sold the SNAP benefits for cash at approximately 50% of the value of the benefits on the SNAP card.

In 2011, prior to being laid off from his temporary position at a health care business, Snowden stole lists of health care professionals' personal identifying information. Beginning in 2013, Snowden used the health care professionals' stolen identity information to apply for SNAP benefits, creating fraudulent supporting documents in the names of the victims to provide when requested during the application process. Snowden used the addresses of acquaintances or nearby vacant homes for the mailing of SNAP cards, which Snowden, or another at his direction, would pick up from those addresses.

Snowden admitted that he sold the majority of the SNAP benefit cards for cash. After the buyer used the SNAP card, the card was returned to Snowden, who would sell the card to another buyer when the next month's benefits were loaded to the card. Snowden and his co-conspirator, Larae Betrand, also used the

SNAP cards at stores to purchase groceries for themselves. Over 220 victims' identities were used to apply for SNAP benefits and at least \$1,021,583.72 in SNAP benefits were issued and redeemed through the scheme. Snowden also used victims' identities to open utility accounts including internet, phone, and electricity at his residence.

From 2015 to 2019, Snowden was in a relationship with Larae Betrand. Betrand was aware of and participated in the SNAP fraud scheme. In addition to receiving DHS mail and SNAP benefit cards at her home address, Betrand sometimes posed as victims on phone calls with DHS and provided false information to secure approval of the fraudulent SNAP applications. Snowden provided Betrand fraudulent SNAP cards for her personal use.

As detailed in his plea agreement, Snowden and Betrand also engaged in a scheme to obtain fraudulent loans from banks and a credit union by providing false employment information on applications for six vehicle loans. Snowden fabricated documents, intending to deceive the lenders regarding his and Betrand's ability to repay the loans. Snowden was unemployed during all relevant times, and Snowden was aware that Betrand earned significantly less than they claimed on the false documents. Between March 2017 and February 2020 Snowden and Betrand fraudulently obtained \$92,668.58 for four auto loans—two loan applications were denied.

Finally, in the spring of 2020 and continuing through at least July 9, 2020, Snowden attempted to obtain COVID-19 SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) using the identity of at least one of the SNAP victims. Using the victim's information, Snowden established a fictitious business entity in the name of the victim and obtained fraudulent credentials to apply for EIDL. Snowden did not complete the transaction before law enforcement searched his residence on July 16, 2020.

Snowden faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison for conspiracy to commit wire fraud and a mandatory minimum of two years in prison, consecutive to any other sentence imposed, for aggravated identity theft. Additionally, Snowden will be required to pay restitution of at least \$1,021,583.72. U.S. District Judge Ellen L. Hollander has scheduled sentencing for June 3, 2021 at 10 a.m.

Betrand, age 39, of Elkridge, Maryland, previously pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in relation to this scheme. Betrand will also be ordered to pay at least \$5,000 restitution.

Acting United States Attorney Jonathan F. Lenzner commended the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the Maryland Department of Human Services Office of Inspector General for their work in the investigation. Mr. Lenzner thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul E. Budlow who is prosecuting the case.

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Topic(s):

Identity Theft

Component(s):

USAO - Maryland

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