



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Western District of Washington

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

Pair indicted for defrauding COVID-19 benefit programs

Total fraud against Employment Security Department and Small Business Administration exceeds \$1 million

Seattle – A Seattle area pair was indicted today in the Western District of Washington, for more than \$1 million in fraud on COVID-19 relief programs, announced U.S. Attorney Nick Brown. Bryan Alan Sparks, 40, and Autumn Gail Luna, 22, are charged in a 16-count indictment with defrauding Washington State Employment Security Division (ESD) of more than \$500,000 in benefits and defrauding the Small Business Administration of approximately \$520,000. The two are currently in federal custody in Washington, D.C. after being arrested at Union Station with cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine.

According to the indictment, from March 2020 until at least January 2021, the two used stolen personal information of more than 50 Washington residents to apply for unemployment benefits. The pair had benefits loaded onto debit cards and mailed to a variety of addresses in the Seattle area where they or their co-conspirators could retrieve them. They also opened fraudulent bank accounts and had benefits paid directly to those accounts. They also used many of those same stolen identities to apply for loans under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The Small Business Administration paid approximately \$520,000 in Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) proceeds to the pair. The total unemployment benefits the two fraudulently obtained is more than \$500,000.

In furtherance of their scheme, Sparks and Luna used the stolen personal information to create counterfeit driver's licenses and obtain fraudulent driver's licenses from the Washington State Department of Licensing. They maintained over a dozen phone numbers on as many cell phones, each of which were labeled with the phone number and names of stolen identities. The defendants also maintained detailed ledgers and electronic files of stolen personal information, credit card numbers, and financial transactions associated with each stolen identity.

The pair are charged with conspiracy, 5 counts of mail fraud, 6 counts of wire fraud and 4 counts of aggravated identity theft.

Conspiracy is punishable by 5 years in prison. Wire fraud and mail fraud that relate to a presidentially declared major disaster or emergency is punishable by up to 30 years in prison. Aggravated identity theft is

punishable by a mandatory minimum two years in prison to run consecutive to any other sentence imposed in the case.

The charges contained in the indictment are only allegations. A person is presumed innocent unless and until he or she is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

The investigation of this case is led by the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General and U.S. Postal Inspection Service, with partners: Colusa County Sheriff's Office (CA); Washington State Employment Security Department; Small Business Administration, Office of the Inspector General; Amtrak Police Department (D.C.); FBI (Sacramento, CA office); FBI Cyber Task Force (D.C.); Washington State Department of Licensing, Driver and Vehicle Investigations; and the Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Cindy Chang and Seth Wilkinson.

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>.

[sparks-luna_indictment.pdf](#)

Attachment(s):

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Topic(s):

Coronavirus
Disaster Fraud
Financial Fraud
Identity Theft

Component(s):

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