

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT *of* GEORGIA

[U.S. Attorneys](#) » [Southern District of Georgia](#) » [News](#)

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Georgia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, January 9, 2023

## **Fort Stewart soldier sentenced to prison for prolific fraud scheme targeting COVID-19 relief programs, student loans**

### **Sentence includes order to repay more than \$3.5 million**

SAVANNAH, GA: A U.S. Army soldier stationed at Fort Stewart has been sentenced to federal prison for leading a prolific fraud scheme in which she and others illegally raked in millions of dollars from COVID-19 relief programs and federal student loan forgiveness.

Dara Buck, a/k/a Dara Butler, 39, of Ladson, S.C., a U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 stationed at Fort Stewart, was sentenced to 42 months in prison after previously pleading guilty to Conspiracy to Commit an Offense Against the United States, said David H. Estes, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia. U.S. District Court Judge R. Stan Baker also ordered Buck to pay restitution of \$3,680,247 and to serve three years of supervised release at the completion of her prison term. There is no parole in the federal system.

“While serving in the U.S. Army, Dara Buck engaged in a massive scheme to defraud the taxpayers of the nation she was sworn to serve,” said U.S. Attorney Estes. “With our law enforcement partners, we are committed to identifying and holding accountable those who defraud COVID-19 relief programs to feed their self-serving greed.”

As described in court documents, from August 2017 through May 2021, Buck led a conspiracy to fraudulently obtain funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act’s Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), and to secure the fraudulent discharge of federal student loans using falsified disability claims.

Buck admitted submitting more than 150 fraudulent PPP loan applications to the Small Business Administration for herself and others in the conspiracy, resulting in more than \$3 million in fraudulent disbursements from banks to members of the conspiracy. Buck directly received fraudulently obtained PPP funding, or was paid by conspirators for submitting their fraudulent applications.

In addition, conspirators paid Buck to submit falsified U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs certifications for total and permanent disability to the U.S. Department of Education in order to fraudulently secure the discharge of more than a dozen student loans totaling more than \$1 million.

“Individuals that conspire to defraud Small Business Administration programs will be brought to justice and face the consequences of their illicit activity,” said SBA Office of Inspector General’s Eastern Region Special Agent in Charge

Amaleka McCall-Brathwaite. “I want to thank the U.S. Department of Justice and our law enforcement partners for their dedication and pursuit of justice.”

“This sentencing sends a clear message to those who defraud the U.S. Government and squander valuable taxpayer dollars,” stated Special Agent in Charge Darrin K. Jones, Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), Southeast Field Office. “I applaud the work of the U.S. Attorney’s Office and our investigative partners on this case.”

“This sentence holds the defendant accountable for her large scale fraud scheme that impacted multiple federal agencies and robbed the taxpayers of millions of dollars,” said Special Agent in Charge David Spilker with the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General’s Southeast Field Office. “The VA OIG is committed to investigating anyone who would exploit VA’s programs and services to fraudulently enrich themselves. We will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to hold wrongdoers accountable.”

“We will continue to aggressively pursue those who defrauded the Paycheck Protection Program which was funded by taxpayers and designed to assist businesses during the pandemic,” said J. Russell George, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. “We appreciate the efforts by our federal partners and the U.S. Attorney’s Office to hold these individuals to account.”

“Federal student aid exists so that individuals can make their dream of a higher education a reality. Ensuring that those who steal student aid through fraud or other means are stopped and held accountable for their criminal actions is a big part of our mission. Dara Buck willfully defrauded America’s taxpayers and students in a deliberate and methodical way, and her sentence should serve as a warning to anyone who intentionally steals or misappropriates Federal student aid dollars: you will be caught and held accountable for your unlawful actions,” said Reginald J. France, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General’s Southeastern Regional Office. “I’m proud of the work of the Office of Inspector General and our law enforcement partners for their work in this case.”

The case was investigated by the Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General; the Defense Criminal Investigative Service; U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General; the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General; and the U.S. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration; and prosecuted for the United States by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ryan C. Grover.

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](tel:866-720-5721) or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

---

**Topic(s):**

Coronavirus  
Disaster Fraud

**Component(s):**

USAO - Georgia, Southern

**Contact:**

Barry L. Paschal, Public Affairs Officer: 912-652-4422

**Press Release Number:**

03-23