

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
CENTRAL DISTRICT *of* CALIFORNIA

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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Central District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, September 14, 2022

Victorville Woman Arrested on Indictment Alleging She Used Prison Inmates' Names to Fraudulently Obtain Over \$500,000 in COVID Relief

RIVERSIDE, California – A San Bernardino County woman was arrested today on a seven-count federal grand jury indictment alleging she fraudulently obtained more than \$500,000 in pandemic-related unemployment insurance (UI) benefits by using the names of inmates locked up the California state prison system.

Cynthia Ann Hernandez, 32, a.k.a. "Cynthia Roberts," of Victorville, was taken into custody and is expected to appear for her arraignment tomorrow in United States District Court in Riverside.

Hernandez is charged with four counts of mail fraud, one count of access device fraud in excess of \$1,000, and two counts of aggravated identity theft.

According to the indictment returned on September 9, from June 2020 to August 2020, Hernandez filed with the California Employment Development Department (EDD) fraudulent applications for UI benefits in the names of persons incarcerated in the California state prison system. EDD manages California's unemployment insurance benefit program.

Hernandez allegedly falsely stated on the UI benefits applications that the named claimants were individuals whose employment had been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and were eligible for pandemic unemployment assistance under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Congress passed the CARES Act in March 2020, in part, to help individuals whose employment and finances were adversely affected by the pandemic.

The applications also falsely stated that the named claimants were eligible for the UI benefits and that they resided and worked in Los Angeles and Orange counties. EDD then authorized Bank of America to issue debit cards in the claimants' names and were mailed to Hernandez's mailing address, according to the indictment. Once Hernandez allegedly received the debit cards, she used them to withdraw cash at ATMs and banking centers.

In total, Hernandez allegedly caused at least 29 fraudulent applications to be filed with EDD, resulting in losses to EDD and the United States Treasury of approximately \$515,138.

An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

This matter was investigated by the United States Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General; the California Employment Development Department – Investigation Division; Homeland Security Investigations; the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation; the United States Department of Homeland Security – Office of Inspector General; the United States Postal Inspection Service; and United States Customs and Border Protection – Special Response Team.

Assistant United States Attorney Solomon Kim of the Terrorism and Export Crimes Section is prosecuting this case.

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

Topic(s):

Coronavirus
Identity Theft

Component(s):

USAO - California, Central

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