

PRESS RELEASE

# Husband and Wife Plead Guilty to \$5 Million Unemployment Fraud Scheme

Thursday, February 15, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of California

### **NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – February 15, 2024**

SAN DIEGO –Eduard Buse and Florentina Sima pleaded guilty in federal court today to fraud and money laundering charges, admitting they participated in a scheme to steal more than \$5 million in California unemployment benefits intended to help workers affected by the pandemic.

Buse and Sima were indicted by a federal grand jury in October 2023 along with 12 others. The indictment alleged that the fraud scheme involved helping hundreds of undeserving applicants apply for benefits using fraudulent documents. In their respective plea agreements, Buse and Sima admitted the fraud resulted in almost \$5.2 million in bogus claims paid by the state of California.

“These covid relief funds were meant to provide critical financial relief during the pandemic. Instead, the money was used to buy luxury cars and jewelry,” said U.S. Attorney Tara McGrath. “We will not only continue to prosecute those who diverted money intended to serve as a lifeline, but we will pursue every avenue to recover and return that money to public use.”

“The Covid-19 pandemic placed an enormous financial strain on millions of Americans; however, some individuals decided to use other people’s pain as an opportunity for financial gain,” said FBI San Diego Special Agent in Charge Stacey Moy. “Our pursuit of justice for those affected by fraud during the pandemic will not stop until each and every person who took advantage of individuals during this critical time is prosecuted for defrauding the U.S. government and innocent people.”

“The defendants’ abuse of programs designed to help people in need during and in the wake of the Covid pandemic is particularly despicable,” said Special Agent in Charge Tyler Hatcher, IRS Criminal Investigation, Los Angeles Field Office. “Even worse, they took money intended to help people keep their heads above water and showered themselves with luxury items. IRS Criminal Investigation is committed to rooting out this sort of evil by following the money to bring people like these defendants to justice.”

According to Buse’s plea agreement, he not only collected \$28,350 in undue EDD benefits for himself but also facilitated payouts of \$244,050 to 14 co-conspirators, including Sima. Buse then sent \$128,902.99 and Sima sent \$58,881.53 of fraud proceeds to their associates in Romania through money service businesses.

Buse admitted that he purchased a 2020 BMW X6 for \$105,044 in Glendale, California, with proceeds from the fraud and shipped it from San Diego to Romania on April 28, 2023.

On November 13, 2023, Romanian authorities served search warrants on addresses affiliated with Buse at the request of the United States. They seized the BMW with California license plates along with approximately \$9,476.50 in U.S. currency; a Rolex Yacht Master II and a rose gold luxury men’s watch purchased for \$15,550 U.S. dollars; a Rolex Sky Dweller watch; a Breitling 1884 men’s watch; and a Rolex Oyster Perpetual Date women’s watch.

As part of their plea agreements, Buse and Sima agreed to forfeit the BMW, cash and luxury watches, along with all other property seized in connection with the case.

Buse also agreed to forfeit \$128,902.99 and agreed to pay restitution in the amount of \$244,050 to the State of California Employment Development Department. Sima agreed to forfeit \$58,881.53 and pay the same amount in restitution to the State of California Employment Development Department.

Buse and Sima are scheduled to be sentenced on May 20, 2024, at 9 a.m. before U.S. District Judge Larry A. Burns. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jessica Adeline Schulberg and Valerie Chu.

**DEFENDANTS**  
**LAB**

**Case Number 23CR2090-**

Eduard Buse  
Romanian

Age: 30

Transient,

Florentina Sima  
Romanian

Age: 29

Transient,

### **SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Title 18, U.S.C. § 1349 — Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud

Title 18, U.S.C. § 1343 — Wire Fraud

Maximum penalty: Thirty years in prison, \$1 million fine

Title 18 U.S.C. § 1956(a)(2)(B)(i) — Laundering of Monetary Instruments

Maximum penalty: Twenty years in prison and \$500,000 fine or twice the value of the monetary instrument or funds involved in the transportation, transmission, or transfer, whichever is greater

### **AGENCY**

Federal Bureau of Investigation

San Diego Police Department Economic Crimes Unit

IRS Criminal Investigation

California Employment Development Department Investigative Division

U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

\*The charges and allegations contained in an indictment or complaint are merely accusations, and the defendants are considered innocent unless and until proven guilty.

### **Contact**

**Media Relations Director Kelly Thornton (619) 546-9726 or  
Kelly.Thornton@usdoj.gov**

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### **Topics**

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