

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Victorville Woman Sentenced to 2½ Years in Federal Prison for Using Inmates’ Info to Illegally Obtain Over \$500,000 in COVID Jobless Aid**

Monday, June 26, 2023

**For Immediate Release**

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

*LOS ANGELES* – A San Bernardino County woman was sentenced today to 30 months in federal prison for fraudulently obtaining 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, 33, a.k.a. “Cynthia Roberts,” of Victorville, was sentenced by United States District Judge Mark C. Scarsi, who also ordered her to pay \$515,138 in restitution.

Hernandez pleaded guilty on January 23 to one count of mail fraud and one count of access device fraud.

During the summer of 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 and who were ineligible to receive jobless benefits. EDD manages California’s unemployment insurance benefit program.

Hernandez 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 that were mailed to Hernandez's mailing address.

In total, Hernandez caused at least 29 fraudulent applications to be filed with EDD.

"[Hernandez] orchestrated a sophisticated scheme that deprived the state of over [\$500,000] meant to provide relief for vulnerable taxpayers who were unable to work due to the COVID-19 pandemic," prosecutors wrote in a sentencing memorandum. "She did so by applying for UI benefits for people who were plainly ineligible and did so for her own financial gain."

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's Special Response Team.

Assistant United States Attorney Haoxiaohan Cai of the General Crimes Section prosecuted 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>.

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## **Topics**

**CORONAVIRUS**

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