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DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney's Office  
District of Puerto Rico

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### **32 Individuals Indicted for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) Fraud**

SAN JUAN, P.R. – On August 22, 2024, a Federal Grand Jury in the District of Puerto Rico returned 32 separate indictments charging 32 individuals with engaging in fraud to obtain Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits totaling \$981,071, announced W. Stephen Muldrow, United States Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (USDOL-OIG) are in charge of the investigations with the assistance of the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources.

According to the indictments, the defendants engaged in schemes to defraud the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources (Departamento del Trabajo y Recursos Humanos, “DTRH”) by submitting fraudulent applications to obtain unemployment insurance benefits which contained PUA funds.

Under the provisions of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, persons who were business owners, self-employed workers, independent contractors, or gig workers qualified for federal benefits (PUA) administered by the DTRH if they previously performed such work in Puerto Rico and were unemployed, partially unemployed, unable to work, or unavailable to work due to a COVID-19 related reason. To obtain these federal benefits, individuals could apply online through the DTRH’s web site—[www.trabajo.pr.gov](http://www.trabajo.pr.gov). Claimants answered various questions to establish their eligibility and were required to provide personal identifying information, which included their name, mailing address, gender, email, phone number, social security number, and date of birth. Moreover, claimants had to identify a qualifying occupational status and COVID-19 related reason for being out of work. In their application, claimants could also submit several documents as evidence of their income.

If the DTRH approved a claimant’s application, the DTRH would send a check to the claimant via the United States Postal Service for qualified benefits which could contain regular unemployment insurance benefits and federal funds in the form of PUA, Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC); and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) benefits.

The indictments charge the 32 individuals with theft of United States' property—PUA benefits—mail fraud and misuse of Social Security numbers because the defendants engaged in deceptive conduct designed to fraudulently obtain multiple-unemployment checks from the DTRH by using false social security numbers. The defendants received PUA benefits from the DTRH via mail in the form of checks that they were not qualified or authorized to receive.

The defendants charged and the amount of money fraudulently obtained are:

1. Alexander Hernández-Casanova (\$21,576)
2. Héctor Javier Fernández-Porrata (\$40,488)
3. José Emanuel Serrano (\$30,564)
4. José Manuel Salinas-Bermúdez (\$18,180)
5. Kenny A. Cruz-Chévere (\$49,476)
6. Luis Felipe Cesani-Cintrón (\$66,390)
7. Michael Martínez-Torres (\$21,444)
8. Juan José Reyes-Hernaiz (\$35,022)
9. Neyscha Lee Font-Fontanez (\$22,908)
10. Christopher J. Mercedes-Sánchez (\$30,168)
11. Taylor Bryan Rentas-Día (\$22,374)
12. Danny Olmo-Quñones (\$22,440)
13. Francisco J. Carrillo-Hernaiz (\$43,152)
14. Julio Omar Rodríguez-Algarín (\$31,632)
15. Alexander Barbosa-Concepción (\$23,304)
16. Bryan Omar De Jesús-Pizarro (\$53,636)
17. Bryan De Jesús-Acevedo (\$17,580)
18. Carlos Alberto Batista-Serrano (\$53,070)
19. Fabián Abdiel García-Concepción (\$22,440)
20. Dianelys Ailysh Torres-Pizarro (\$34,692)
21. Jamisael Jiménez-Pérez (\$30,366)
22. Jerry Isaías Medina-Hernández (\$20,112)
23. Jesús Manuel Crespo-Rivera (\$31,830)
24. Glendaly Rivera-Torres (\$21,708)
25. Joumar Vale-Sauri (\$33,069)
26. Kelvin A. Fermaint-Hernández (\$22,374)
27. Kenneth Javier Escalera-Paris (\$17,910)
28. Manuel Salinas-Bermudez (\$40,086)
29. Rodney Eiram Rodríguez-Rivera (\$20,112)
30. Yoanelys Vázquez-González (\$32,430)
31. Eluzay De Jesús-Acevedo (\$17,376)
32. Luis Angel Crespo-Rivera (\$33,162)

“The Justice Department remains committed to using every available federal tool to combat and prevent COVID-19 related fraud,” said U.S. Attorney Muldrow. “We will continue to hold accountable those who seek to exploit the pandemic for personal gain, to protect vulnerable populations, and to safeguard the integrity of taxpayer-funded programs.”

“This repeat violation is deeply concerning. It is clear that some individuals continue to exploit a worldwide crisis for personal gain by disregarding the law. We want to make it abundantly clear

that this behavior will not be tolerated, now or ever,” stated Special Agent in Charge of the FBI San Juan Field Office, Joseph González. “The FBI and our law enforcement partners will relentlessly pursue all leads to ensure that these criminals face justice. If you or anyone you know has information about these crimes, I urge you to come forward by calling (787) 987-6500 or submitting a tip online at [tips.FBI.gov](https://tips.fbi.gov). To those who have engaged in these fraudulent acts, I strongly advise you to come forward and cooperate with law enforcement before we take action against you.”

“An important part of the mission of the U.S Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations of fraud involving pandemic-related unemployment insurance programs. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of allegations,” stated Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent-in-Charge, Northeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

“The 32 defendants charged are alleged to have collectively stolen close to a million dollars from the federal government by committing fraud in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance under the CARES Act. These charges are a reminder that fraud is not a victimless crime and individuals who attempt to commit fraud face significant penalties,” said Juan A. Vargas, Inspector in Charge, Miami Division, U.S. Postal Inspection Service. “The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is committed to working with our law enforcement partners to ensure the U.S. Mail is not utilized as a tool to defraud the government and taxpayers.”

Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott Anderson is in charge of the prosecution of these cases. If convicted, the defendants are facing the following sentences: up to 20 years of imprisonment for mail fraud; up to 10 years of imprisonment for theft of government money; up to 5 years of imprisonment for misuse of a social security number; a fine of up to \$250,000; and three years of supervised release.

To report a COVID-19-related fraud scheme or suspicious activity, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) by calling the NCDF Hotline at 1-866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>

*Indictments contain only charges and are not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty.*

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