



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **High Desert Woman Pleads Guilty in Unemployment Insurance Fraud Scheme Involving Bogus Movie Production Companies**

*LOS ANGELES* – An Antelope Valley woman pleaded guilty this morning in a mail fraud scheme that used personal data stolen from elderly victims in an effort to defraud California's unemployment insurance program out of nearly \$300,000.

Dena Peterman, who also uses the name Dena Buttram, 32, of Littlerock, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud pursuant to a plea agreement filed yesterday in United States District Court.

According to the plea agreement and other court documents, over the course of two years, Peterman and her co-conspirators stole social security numbers and other personal identifying information that was used to defraud the California Employment Development Department (EDD), which administers the state unemployment insurance program. Peterman and her co-conspirators targeted senior citizens as part of the scam, obtaining social security numbers and other personal data from the elderly victims in Oregon and California by telling them that they had an opportunity to be cast in remakes of popular movies.

Peterman and her co-conspirators created bogus companies supposedly related to the movie industry with names such as Nine Maids Movie Production, Western Film Animation and High Desert Productions. Using the stolen personal information, a co-conspirator filed fictitious wage reports with the EDD and then fraudulently sought unemployment insurance benefits for the people who supposedly worked for the movie companies. The EDD subsequently provided unemployment insurance benefits in the names of these individuals through debit cards that were mailed to addresses that Peterman or her co-conspirators controlled.

As a result of this scheme, Peterman and her co-conspirators sought more than \$290,000 in unemployment insurance benefits, and the EDD suffered losses of approximately \$221,612.

Peterman pleaded guilty before United States District Judge Dolly M. Gee, who is scheduled to sentence the defendant on January 6.

As a result of today's guilty plea, Peterman faces a statutory maximum penalty of five years in federal prison.

This case is the result of a joint investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General and the California Employment Development Department.

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