

# Californian Sentenced to 18 Months' Imprisonment for Unlawfully Collecting \$100,000 in Unemployment Benefits During COVID-19

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Utah

Salt Lake City, Utah – Robert James Waff, 50, of Sacramento, California, was sentenced today to a year and a half imprisonment, three years' supervised release and ordered by the court to pay \$114,066 in restitution. The sentence, imposed by U.S. District Court Judge Tena Campbell, comes after Waff admitted to devising a scheme to defraud the California Employment Development Department by unlawfully collecting unemployment benefits during COVID-19.

According to court documents and statements made at the change of plea hearing, Waff pleaded guilty in March 2024 to aiding and abetting wire fraud.

From June 2020 to September 2020, Waff devised and attempted to execute a scheme to defraud the California Employment Development Department (EDD) by applying for unemployment benefits that were funded by the CARES Act in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Waff assisted three coconspirators in committing the same acts for a share of their unemployment insurance funds. For example, on one occasion Waff submitted an online application for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits through the (EDD) website, while he was a resident of Clearfield, Utah. Waff listed his residence and mailing address as Fair Oaks, CA. Waff also claimed he had lost employment due to COVID-19 and that before losing employment his annual income was \$44,000, and that he planned to return to work for his previous employer. Waff's fraudulent California EDD application and continued renewal of his California EDD benefits resulted in Waff receiving over \$36,000 in fraudulent payments.

In total, by helping others commit the same fraudulent filings, the actual loss resulting from fraudulent UI benefit claims exceeded \$100,000.

“Mr. Waff stole money intended for citizens who were honestly unemployed and hurting during COVID-19,” said United States Attorney Trina A. Higgins for the District of Utah. “His repeated behavior in aiding others to commit the same crime took more money away from people who needed help during the pandemic. My office will prosecute people who defraud the government and taxpayers.”

“Mr. Waff tried to cash in on the Covid-19 pandemic and stole money from those who legitimately needed it,” said Special Agent in Charge Shohini Sinha of the Salt Lake City FBI. “The pandemic may be over, but the FBI will continue to investigate those who willfully defraud federal government programs for personal gain.”

“Robert Waff stole from our nation’s unemployment insurance (UI) system by fraudulently filing for UI benefits in his name and the names of others who were not entitled to such benefits. He took advantage of the UI system at a time when so many deserving American workers were suffering from pandemic-related economic challenges. The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General remains committed to combatting UI fraud. Our efforts to hold individuals accountable for their fraudulent schemes will continue. I would like to acknowledge the outstanding investigative work of the Salt Lake City FBI, the California Employment Development Department, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security-OIG and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Utah in this collaborative investigative effort,” said Quentin Heiden, Special Agent in Charge, Western Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

The case is was investigated jointly by the FBI Salt Lake City Division and the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (OIG).

Assistant United States Attorney Brian Williams of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Utah prosecuted the 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 (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

## **Contact**

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