

PRESS RELEASE

Former Georgia State Representative Pleads Guilty to Pandemic Unemployment Fraud Scheme

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia

ATLANTA – Karen L. Bennett, who resigned from her position as an elected member of the Georgia House of Representatives on January 1, 2026, has pleaded guilty to making false statements to fraudulently obtain thousands of dollars of emergency pandemic unemployment assistance payments.

"Bennett was elected to represent her fellow citizens and took a solemn oath to promote the best interests and prosperity of the State of Georgia," said U.S. Attorney Theodore S. Hertzberg. "Instead, she violated that oath and, during an unprecedented emergency, lied to line her own pockets with taxpayer money intended to help community members in need."

"Public trust is fundamental to our system of government, and elected officials are expected to uphold the law—not exploit it," said Paul Brown, Special Agent in Charge of FBI Atlanta. "The FBI will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to identify and hold accountable anyone who abuses emergency relief programs, especially those who knowingly divert critical assistance away from individuals and families who truly need it during times of crisis."

"Karen Bennett, while serving her constituents as an elected member of the Georgia House of Representatives, unlawfully enriched herself with taxpayer funds from an unemployment program intended to assist American workers who lost their jobs through no fault of their own," said Anthony P. D'Esposito, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General. "We will continue our efforts to investigate and bring to justice all who defraud taxpayers by exploiting Department of Labor programs."

"Karen Bennett lied to obtain personal benefits and as an elected official should rightfully be considered the lowest of the low," said Nigel Lange, Inspector General, State of Georgia Office of Inspector General. "Her sentencing should serve as a warning for others who have taken an oath of office that there is zero tolerance for this type of crime in Georgia."

According to U.S. Attorney Hertzberg, the charges, and other information presented in court: In 2020, in response to the forced closures of businesses and unprecedented economic hardship resulting from the COVID-19 emergency, the U.S. Congress created special unemployment compensation programs to provide cash assistance to individuals who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Applicants for the programs had to provide their recent work histories and confirm, among other things, that COVID-19 was the reason they were unemployed. Applicants also had to provide a certification for every week for which they wished to claim benefits, attesting to whether they were actively seeking work for the week and the reason they were unemployed.

Bennett, while serving as the Georgia House Representative for District 94 in 2020, applied for and submitted weekly certifications to claim pandemic unemployment assistance benefits for weeks in March through August 2020. In those forms, she claimed that her only earnings were \$300 per week from the Georgia General Assembly, that her other employer – Metro Therapy Providers, Inc. – would not let her return to her office because of COVID-19 protocols, and that she was actively looking for other work.

However, in reality, Bennett was concealing that she was also receiving a steady paycheck of \$905 every week from her employment at a church. Additionally, she was the sole owner of Metro Therapy Providers, Inc., and her work for that company consisted of administrative functions she performed from her home even prior to the pandemic. The business continued to function and generate revenues for her, she continued her work to support it from her home office, and she was not looking for any other employment.

As a result of the false statements in her application and weekly certifications, Bennett collected \$13,940 of pandemic unemployment benefits to which she was not entitled.

Karen Bennett, 70, of Stone Mountain, Georgia, pleaded guilty to making false statements to obtain funds administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. Sentencing is scheduled for April 15, 2026, at 10:30 a.m., before U.S. District Judge Eleanor L. Ross.

This case is being investigated by the Georgia Office of the State Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and DeKalb County District Attorney's Office.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Garrett L. Bradford is prosecuting the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>

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>.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

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