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Former State Employee Pleads Guilty to Bribery Conspiracy Involving More Than \$2.8 Million in Unemployment Insurance Assistance Funding

DETROIT – A former employee of the Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency pleaded guilty today to conspiring to commit federal program bribery and engaging in aggravated identity theft, announced United States Attorney Jerome F. Gorgon Jr.

Joining in the announcement were Joseph Cuffari, Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security—Office of Inspector General; Megan Howell, Special Agent-in-Charge, Great Lakes Region, U.S. Department of Labor-Office of Inspector General; Acting Special Agent in Charge Reuben Coleman, Federal Bureau of Investigation; and Jason Palmer, Director of the State of Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency

Janine Rayford, 39, of Redford, pleaded guilty before Judge Judith E. Levy.

According to court records, while working for the Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency, Rayford accepted more than \$50,000 in bribe payments. Rayford admitted that as part of the bribery conspiracy, she personally accessed unemployment insurance assistance claims without authorization; improperly dismissed and closed fraud prevention triggers and information requests relating to claims, including claims she knew to be fraudulent; and caused improper benefit payments to be issued. Rayford acknowledged that as a result of the illicit conduct in which she engaged, more than \$2.86 million in unemployment insurance assistance funding was issued to third-party claimants.

Sentencing is set for January 8, 2026, before Judge Levy. Rayford faces a mandatory two-year sentence of imprisonment for having engaged in aggravated identity theft and also faces up to 5 years' imprisonment for having conspired to engaged in federal program bribery.

U.S. Attorney Gorgon stated, "If you're a public official whose side hustle is taking bribes, your next job will be answering to a judge. Corruption destroys public trust in government and will be aggressively prosecuted by my office."

"Former Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency employee, Janine Rayford, abused her position by misusing her access to sensitive employment information and state data systems to defraud the unemployment insurance program for personal financial gain," said Megan Howell, Special Agent-in-Charge, Great Lakes Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector

General. “We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate those who seek to exploit these critical U.S. Department of Labor programs.”

“Today’s guilty plea sends a clear and powerful message that fraud against the United States Government and public officials profiting at the expense of the public will never be tolerated,” said Reuben Coleman, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Detroit Field Office. “I would like to thank our FBI Detroit Area Corruption Task Force for their diligent work alongside our federal and state partners to ensure justice is preserved and the public’s trust is protected.”

“This plea sends a powerful message that no one is above the law, not even those who work for the UIA,” said UIA Director Jason Palmer. “Our staff is required to adhere to strict ethics guidelines. Janine Rayford willingly violated that professional code of conduct, betraying her colleagues and the taxpayers of Michigan for her own short-sighted financial gain. We will not tolerate conspirators who selfishly steal from the very people they are supposed to be serving.”

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Andrew J. Yahkind. The investigation is being conducted jointly by the Department of Homeland Security—Office of Inspector General, Department of Labor—Office of Inspector General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Unemployment Insurance Agency, Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity

