

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fresno Woman Charged with COVID-19 Pandemic-Related Benefits Fraud

FRESNO, Calif. — A federal grand jury brought a six-count indictment against Cecilia Aquino, 34, of Fresno, today charging her with mail fraud, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft for submitting unemployment insurance claims applications for Small Business Administration (SBA) Economic Injury and Disaster Loans using stolen identities, Acting U.S. Attorney Phillip A. Talbert announced.

According to court documents, from June through November 2020, Aquino submitted unemployment benefit claims in at least seven states and at least four loan applications that contained misrepresentations. She claimed that the named individuals last worked as self-employed dancers and owned interior design businesses, and that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they lost their jobs and business revenue, respectively. The state workforce agencies that administer the unemployment insurance system, the SBA, and the United States suffered an actual loss of at least \$220,000 and were subject to a potential loss of more than \$350,000 because of Aquino's fraud. Aquino used the money for gambling, rent, shopping, and other personal expenditures.

This case is the product of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the SBA Office of Inspector General, and the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General. Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph Barton is prosecuting the case.

If convicted, Aquino faces a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 for each of the mail and wire fraud counts, and a mandatory two-year sentence consecutive to other counts and a fine of up to \$250,000 for each of the aggravated identity theft counts. Any sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of any applicable statutory factors and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables. The charges are only allegations. Aquino is presumed innocent until and unless she is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Topic(s):

Financial Fraud

Identity Theft

Component(s):

[USAO - California, Eastern](#)

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