

# **High Desert Woman Charged with Stealing Identities from Elderly Victims as Part of Unemployment Insurance Fraud Scheme**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ***Victims Gave Personal Data in Hopes of Being Cast in Remakes of Movies***

*LOS ANGELES, California* – A federal grand jury this afternoon charged an Antelope Valley woman in an identity theft scheme that used personal data from elderly victims to defraud California's unemployment insurance program out of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Dena Peterman, 32, of Littlerock, was named in an eight-count indictment that charges her with conspiracy, aggravated identity theft and six counts of mail fraud.

Over the course of two years, Peterman and her co-conspirators allegedly stole social security numbers and other personal identifying information that was used to commit unemployment insurance fraud. According to court documents, 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 the 1985 movie "Cocoon" and the 1981 film "On Golden Pond."

Once they had obtained the personal information, Peterman and her co-conspirators allegedly created bogus companies supposedly related to the movie industry, submitted false wage information for the elderly victims and other individuals whom they falsely claimed worked for these companies, and submitted bogus unemployment insurance claims in the names of these individuals. The California Employment Development Department (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, investigators believe that the EDD suffered losses of approximately \$500,000.

Peterman was arrested on May 18 pursuant to a criminal complaint that had been filed in federal court. A United States Magistrate Judge ordered the Peterman be held without bond. She is scheduled to be arraigned on the indictment on June 5.

*An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in court.*

If convicted of the charges in the indictment, Peterman would face a statutory maximum penalty of five years in federal prison on the conspiracy, up to 20 years for each mail fraud count, and a mandatory consecutive two-year sentence for the identity theft count.

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.