

PRESS RELEASE

Houston Woman Sentenced for \$800,000 Covid Fraud Scheme

Wednesday, January 22, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Missouri

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – A Houston, Texas, woman was sentenced in federal court today for fraudulently receiving more than \$800,000 in Missouri and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act unemployment benefits using the identity information of numerous other persons.

Prayshana Washington, 37, was sentenced by U.S. Chief District Judge Beth Phillips to three years and one month in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered Washington to pay \$808,019 in restitution to the Missouri Division of Employment Security and \$28,350 in restitution to the California Employment Development Department, for a total of \$836,369 in restitution.

On May 23, 2024, Washington pleaded guilty to one count of theft of government property. Washington admitted she facilitated the filing of false claims in her name and the names of other persons, thereby fraudulently receiving unemployment benefits paid through the state of Missouri. These benefits included benefits from the CARES Act.

Washington fraudulently filed 38 successful claims for unemployment benefits, using the name and personal identifying information of individuals in the state of Missouri and elsewhere. These persons were not eligible to receive Missouri and enhanced unemployment benefits. The scheme lasted over a year and required repeated false statements by Washington to the Missouri Department of Employment Services.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul S. Becker. It was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General and the Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General – Office of Investigations & Labor Racketeering Fraud.

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