



STATE OF OHIO  
**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
RANDALL J. MEYER, OHIO INSPECTOR GENERAL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**INVESTIGATION LEADS TO THE INDICTMENT OF TRIO INCLUDING MOTHER, DAUGHTER, AND FRIEND  
IN \$7.3 MILLION PANDEMIC UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE FRAUD SCHEME**  
Columbus, Ohio, August 20, 2025

On August 19th, the Franklin County Grand Jury returned an indictment against Markeya Smith, Brandi Smith, and Shirkara Reggins, along with 12 other co-conspirators for various criminal offenses related to fraudulent claims involving the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. These counts include Engaging in a Pattern of Corrupt Activity, Theft, Tampering with Records, Telecommunications Fraud, and Money Laundering.

The indictment is the result of a collaborative investigation between the Franklin County Prosecuting Attorney, Ohio State Highway Patrol, Office of the Ohio Inspector General, United States Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS).

In 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased unemployment of millions of Americans, Congress passed various programs to address the crisis, including the PUA program. ODJFS, the agency responsible for distributing PUA benefits in Ohio, was inundated with unemployment compensation claims. This increase in claims necessitated ODJFS to hire an outside contractor to help process the claims. In fiscal year 2021, ODJFS disbursed approximately \$7.6 billion in pandemic unemployment benefits. ODJFS later identified millions of dollars of the disbursements as fraudulent.

In October of 2022, ODJFS referred an allegation of wrongdoing concerning Customer Service Representative (CSR) Markeya Smith, who worked for Randstad as an ODJFS contractor assigned to the Ohio PUA program. ODJFS alleged Markeya Smith improperly cleared issues and inflated claimant incomes on PUA claims to fraudulently increase the weekly benefit amounts paid to the claimants. Also in October of 2022, ODJFS referred an allegation of wrongdoing concerning former intermittent ODJFS CSR Brandi Smith. ODJFS alleged Brandi Smith improperly accessed and/or authorized payments on PUA claims.

From their review of ODJFS records, investigators found a significant overlap on PUA claims accessed by the two women. Investigators also learned that Markeya and Brandi Smith were related and were both acquaintances with Insight Global subcontracted employee CSR "Cherita" Reggins, who also improperly accessed and authorized payments on PUA claims to which the claimants were not entitled. Investigators determined that "Cherita" Reggins was actually Shirkara Reggins who was using her mother's name ("Cherita") for her employment at Insight Global and later at ODJFS. In exchange for releasing improper PUA benefit funds, investigators determined the trio received cash or electronic payments from the claimants. The investigation also found that the trio had frequently used recruiters to find additional PUA claimants who desired to have issues removed from their claims and/or have their claims improperly inflated. In exchange for their roles in the scheme, the recruiters also received fees. Investigators discovered that Markeya Smith had access to the ODJFS benefits system after being terminated by Randstad and released nearly \$3 million in improper PUA benefit payments before her access was revoked. Investigators concluded that Markeya and Brandi Smith, and Shirkara Reggins had together performed unauthorized actions in the ODJFS benefit system that resulted in the fraudulent release of over \$7 million in improper PUA benefit payments.

Ohio Inspector General Report of Investigation file number 2022-CA00002,00024,00025-Preliminary is now available at: <https://watchdog.ohio.gov/2025-investigations>.

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