## **PRESS RELEASE**

## Las Vegas Woman Pleads Guilty To Committing Unemployment Insurance Benefits Fraud While On Pretrial Release

Thursday, November 14, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Nevada

**LAS VEGAS** – A Las Vegas woman pleaded guilty today to using a California Employment Development Department (EDD) unemployment insurance benefits debit card in another person's name without the person's authorization.

Deandra Michelle Smith (39) pleaded guilty to illegal transaction with access devices issued to another person. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for February 19, 2025, before United States District Judge Jennifer Dorsey. Smith faces a statutory maximum penalty of 35 years in prison.

According to court documents and admissions made in court by Smith, around March or April 2020, she helped a friend file for unemployment insurance with the California EDD, and the friend began receiving benefits and used the benefits through an EDD debit card. In December 2020, the friend was able to resume employment and told Smith to stop the unemployment claim. However, Smith did not notify the California EDD and unemployment insurance benefits continued to be deposited into the debit card account. Between January 22, 2021 and August 17, 2021, Smith used the debit card to receive more than \$16,100 in benefits that she used for her own personal expenses.

At the time of the crimes, Smith was on pretrial release after pleading guilty to unemployment insurance fraud using the personal identifying information of a family member.

"Deandra Smith engaged in a scheme to defraud DOL's Unemployment Insurance (UI) program by using a friend's personally identifiable information to obtain UI benefits without the friend's permission or consent. Despite being previously prosecuted and convicted for similar conduct, Smith exploited the UI program. This case highlights our strong collaboration with the United States Attorney's Office and our mutual

commitment to secure justice for the American workforce," said Quentin Heiden, Special Agent in Charge, Western Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG).

United States Attorney Jason M. Frierson for the District of Nevada Special Agent in Charge Quentin Heiden of the DOL-OIG, Western Region made the announcement.

The DOL-OIG investigated the case. Assistant United States Attorney Kimberly Frayn is prosecuting the case.

In May 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the department's response to the pandemic, please visit <u>https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus</u>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF web complaint form at: <u>https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form</u>.

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