

PRESS RELEASE

Orange County Man Pleads Guilty to Using Stolen Identities to Apply for More Than \$1 Million in COVID Jobless Benefits

Monday, January 23, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California

SANTA ANA, California – An Orange County man pleaded guilty today to fraudulently applying for more than \$1.2 million in COVID-19 pandemic unemployment insurance (UI) benefits – and receiving more than \$400,000 of the same – by using the stolen identities of two dozen victims.

Nhan Hoang Pham, 36, of Santa Ana, pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud in relation to benefits connected to a presidentially declared emergency.

According to his plea agreement, from July 2020 to April 2021, Pham acquired without authorization or permission the personal identifying information (PII) – including names, dates of birth and Social Security numbers – of people living in California, Texas and Michigan, people he had never met.

Pham then created and submitted fraudulent online applications to the California Employment Development Department (EDD), which administers the state's unemployment insurance program. Pham's fraudulent applications sought federally funded pandemic benefits intended for the jobless and represented that the victims whose PII was unlawfully used received mail at Anaheim addresses that, in fact, Pham controlled.

Upon receipt of the applications, EDD transmitted the claimant information to Bank of America, which caused the issuance and mailing of debit cards to Anaheim addresses that Pham controlled.

Pham then took the fraudulently obtained debit cards and used them to withdraw money at ATMs throughout Orange County.

While Pham tried to obtain approximately \$1,255,350 through fraudulent applications containing the PII of 24 identity theft victims, he received approximately \$408,496.

United States District Judge James V. Selna scheduled a May 22 sentencing hearing, at which time Pham will face a statutory maximum sentence of 30 years in federal prison.

The United States Secret Service; the United States Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General; the California Employment Development Department Investigation Division; the Orange County District Attorney's Office Bureau of Investigation; and the Santa Ana Police Department investigated this matter.

Assistant United States Attorney Daniel S. Lim of the Santa Ana Branch Office is prosecuting this case.

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: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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Updated January 23, 2023