

**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

Western District of Virginia

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, July 26, 2021

**Bristol, Tennessee Woman Sentenced to 24 Months in  
Prison for Role in Pandemic Unemployment Scheme**

ABINGDON, Va. – A Bristol, Tenn. woman, who conspired with others to fraudulently file more than \$499,000 in in pandemic unemployment benefits, was sentenced today to 24 months in federal prison.

Melissa Hayes, 51, pleaded guilty earlier this year to one count of conspiracy to commit unemployment fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud.

According to court documents, Hayes conspired with others to commit fraud against the United States in connection with a scheme involving the filing of fraudulent claims for pandemic unemployment benefits.

Members of the conspiracy, including Hayes, worked together to collect personal identification information of more than 35 co-conspirators, including 15 inmates in the custody of the Virginia Department of Corrections, and to file fraudulent claims of pandemic-related unemployment benefits.

Over the course of nine months, Hayes, and others, filed fraudulent claims for at least 37 individuals, with a total actual loss to the United States of at least \$499,000.

The Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General, Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation, Norton Police Department, and Russell County Sheriff's Office investigated the case.

Acting United States Attorney Daniel P. Bubar of the Western District of Virginia, Acting Special Agent in Charge Darrell J. Waldon, IRS-CI Washington D.C. Field Office and, Syreeta Scott, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, Philadelphia Region made the announcement today.

Assistant United States Attorney Daniel J. Murphy prosecuted the case.

On May 17, 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 <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

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 (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-

5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form> .

**Component(s):**

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