

PRESS RELEASE

# Dothan Woman Sentenced to More Than Five Years in Federal Prison for Her Role in a COVID-19 Era Unemployment Scheme

Wednesday, September 4, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Alabama

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA – On September 4, 2024, a federal judge ordered that 47-year-old Sommer Le Morris, a resident of Dothan, Alabama, receive a sentence of 65 months in prison for her role in filing fraudulent unemployment claims through an expanded Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act program, announced Acting United States Attorney Kevin P. Davidson. Following her prison sentence, Morris will be on supervised release for three years. Federal inmates are not eligible for parole.

Beginning in March 2020, the CARES Act and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act provided for additional funding and expanded access to unemployment insurance programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Alabama, a person entitled to unemployment benefits could receive additional funding from the Alabama Department of Labor. Alabama law also allowed an employer to file what is called a “partial” claim on behalf of an employee who had been temporarily laid off due to a lack of available work during the pandemic.

According to the plea agreement and other court records, from March 2020 through February 2021, Morris filed partial claims for 15 individuals falsely stating that they were entitled to the expanded unemployment benefits. Based on Morris’s false representations, ADOL made significant payments, some through wire transfers, to Morris and others that they were not eligible to receive. In her plea agreement, Morris admitted to using the name, date of birth, and Social Security number of others to carry out her scheme.

On May 30, 2024, Morris pleaded guilty to mail fraud, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft. During her plea hearing in May, Morris also acknowledged that her scheme caused ADOL to issue \$186,478 in fraudulent unemployment claims. The judge ordered Morris to pay restitution to ADOL in that amount.

The United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General and the Alabama Department of Labor investigated this case, which Assistant United States Attorney Russell T. Duraski prosecuted.

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

*Updated September 5, 2024*

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