

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Elkins Woman Admits to More Than \$400,000 in COVID Fraud**

Thursday, October 15, 2026

**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of West Virginia

ELKINS, WEST VIRGINIA — An Elkins, West Virginia woman has admitted to fraudulently collecting hundreds of thousands of dollars in COVID-related unemployment benefits for several individuals, U.S. Attorney Matthew L. Harvey announced today.

Leigh Ann Rinehart, 54, pleaded guilty to bank fraud. According to court documents filed, Rinehart participated in a scheme to fraudulently obtain unemployment benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. The scheme involved unnamed individuals applying for and obtaining unemployment benefits fraudulently in the names of multiple individuals across several states, including Nevada, California, New York and others. Once benefits were approved, Electronic Benefit Payment (EBP) debit cards were sent to Rinehart's address in Elkins. Those EBP cards were loaded with benefits totaling more than \$440,000 from these various states for individuals whose identity was fraudulently used to obtain the benefits, regardless of where they lived.

Rinehart received the cards, activated them, and used them to withdraw funds, purchase money orders, buy cryptocurrency or other items which she then sent to other individuals participating in the scheme or deposited into her own account. Investigators determined that none of the named claimants resided in West Virginia, and none authorized Rinehart to possess or use their unemployment benefits.

More than twenty-four EBP cards were sent to Rinehart's residence from June 2020 through November 2022.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jennifer Conklin is prosecuting the case. The Homeland Security Investigations Office of Inspector General, Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, U.S. Postal Inspection Service and Workforce West Virginia investigated.

On April 7, the Department of Justice announced the creation of the National Fraud Enforcement Division ("Fraud Division"). The Fraud Division is investigating and

prosecuting those who commit fraud against the American people. The Department's work to combat fraud supports President Trump's Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, a whole-of-government effort chaired by Vice President J.D. Vance to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse within Federal benefit programs.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Michael John Aloï presided.

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