

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Northern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

Former State Employee Pleads Guilty to Unemployment Insurance Fraud

Defendant Abused Access to State Systems and Obtained Over \$300,000

ALBANY, NEW YORK – Tramaine Pope, age 33, of the Bronx, New York, pled guilty today to federal program theft, and admitted to abusing her position as a New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) employee to obtain \$314,168 by submitting and approving 20 false unemployment insurance applications. The funds stolen by Pope included benefits from federal programs intended to help out-of-work New Yorkers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The announcement was made by Acting United States Attorney Antoinette T. Bacon; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge, New York Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (USDOL-OIG); Joshua McCallister, Acting Inspector in Charge of the Boston Division of the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS); Matthew Scarpino, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Buffalo Field Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); and NYSDOL Commissioner Roberta Reardon.

Acting United States Attorney Antoinette T. Bacon stated: "Tramaine Pope violated the trust of her fellow New Yorkers during a global public health crisis that left so many without work. She was tasked with helping others at a time of substantial need, but instead exploited her position for personal gain. With our law enforcement partners, we will continue to investigate and prosecute those who abuse the public trust, and steal public funds, during this unprecedented pandemic."

USDOL-OIG Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Mellone stated: "Tramaine Pope abused her position as a Senior Employment Security Clerk with the New York State Department of Labor to create and approve fraudulent unemployment insurance claims. Pope obtained over \$300,000 from these fraudulent claims, a portion of which was earmarked for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to protect the integrity of unemployment insurance benefit programs."

In pleading guilty, Pope admitted to receiving lists of names and personal identifying information from another individual. Pope then used her access to NYSDOL systems to submit and approve fraudulent unemployment insurance claims using the names and other information she received.

Pope agreed to pay restitution in the amount of \$314,168 to the State of New York.

Pope faces up to 10 years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to 3 years when she is sentenced on January 21, 2022 by United States District Judge Mae A. D'Agostino. A defendant's sentence is imposed by a judge based on the particular statute the defendant is charged with violating, the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other factors.

USPIS Acting Inspector in Charge Joshua McCallister stated: "The actions of Ms. Pope to use the trust given to her by the people of New York and her employer to abuse the system and steal from those who were most in need during the pandemic are unconscionable. This case is a great example

of the collaborative effort of law enforcement to bring those to justice who commit criminal acts against the people of New York.”

HSI Acting Special Agent in Charge Matthew Scarpino stated: “HSI remains committed to working closely with our law enforcement partners to identify and prosecute those, like Pope, who have used the COVID pandemic to defraud not only the taxpayer but also those eligible recipients in need of legitimate COVID benefits.”

NYSDOL Commissioner Roberta Reardon stated: “There is no excuse for stealing from others, especially when a person in place of trust abuses their position to knowingly commit fraud. Let this serve as a reminder that if you break the law, you will be held accountable. I thank our partners in the U.S. Attorney’s Office and all levels of law enforcement for their commitment to working with us to fight Unemployment Insurance fraud.”

This case was investigated by USDOL-OIG, USPIS, HSI, and the NYSDOL Office of Special Investigations. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joshua R. Rosenthal and John T. Chisholm.

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>.

Topic(s):
Coronavirus
Financial Fraud

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