

PRESS RELEASE

# Granada Hills Man Sentenced to 17½ Years in Federal Prison for COVID Jobless Benefits Scam and for Stealing Title to Dozens of Cars

Friday, February 9, 2024

## For Immediate Release

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

*LOS ANGELES* – A San Fernando Valley man was sentenced today to 210 months in federal prison for using stolen identities to fraudulently obtain more than \$1,568,000 in COVID-19 pandemic-related unemployment benefits, and for stealing title to dozens of cars by presenting forged documents to the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

Eduard Gasparyan, 38, a.k.a. "Rudy Pineda" and "Papin Galstyan," of Granada Hills, was sentenced by United States District Judge Josephine L. Staton, who also ordered him to pay \$2,232,767 in restitution.

Gasparyan pleaded guilty in February 2023 to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

From at least 2020 to September 2022, Gasparyan and his then-fiancée, Angela Karchyan, 39, of Granada Hills, stole the identities of victims and used them to apply for unemployment insurance benefits from the California Employment Development Department (EDD), which administers the state's unemployment insurance program.

As the COVID-19 pandemic worsened in 2020, Congress implemented Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) provisions to expand access to unemployment benefits to self-employed workers, independent contractors, and others who would not otherwise be eligible for them.

After the bogus unemployment insurance benefits applications were approved, Gasparyan and Karchyan used debit cards containing the fraudulently obtained benefits to withdraw cash at ATMs.

For example, on August 23, 2021, Gasparyan was filmed via surveillance camera at a bank ATM withdrawing \$4,500 from nine debit cards within a 7-minute span. Three of the debit cards were issued in Gasparyan's name while the other six debit cards were in the names of other individuals, court documents state.

From February 2020 to August 2022, EDD paid out approximately \$544,089 in fraudulently obtained jobless benefits on at least 32 claims using the same address in Van Nuys that Gasparyan used as a mailing address, according to court documents. During that same time, EDD paid out approximately \$307,012 in jobless benefits on at least 16 claims to a Granada Hills address linked to Gasparyan.

Gasparyan and Karchyan purchased vehicles using their own names as well as the names of identity theft victims but provided the sellers with worthless checks or bank account numbers to purportedly pay for the vehicles.

Gasparyan and his co-conspirators also used stolen identities to rent vehicles and then caused the DMV to remove the true owners – rental car companies – from the registration for those vehicles by using forged documents.

"The primary victims of [Gasparyan's] conspiracy are the taxpayers, whose efforts to ameliorate the suffering of those who lost their jobs during the COVID pandemic [Gasparyan] took for himself, and the owners of the automobiles he stole," prosecutors argued in a sentencing memorandum. "Of course, many individual victims of [Gasparyan's] identity theft also suffered the anxiety of destroyed credit ratings, and the tremendous effort necessary to prove to lenders and landlords that they are not deadbeats, but rather victims of [Gasparyan's] scheme."

Karchyan pleaded guilty in February 2023 to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud. She is serving a 41-month prison sentence and was ordered to pay \$2,232,767 in restitution.

The United States Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, California Employment Development Department – Criminal Investigations, and the Orange County Auto Theft Task Force investigated this matter.

Assistant United States Attorney Andrew Brown of the Major Frauds Section prosecuted 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 February 9, 2024*

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Press Release Number: 24-038