PRESS RELEASE

Inland Empire Man Pleads Guilty to Obtaining $2.1 Million in COVID-19 Jobless Benefits Using Stolen IDs and Prisoner Names

Tuesday, November 17, 2026

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

RIVERSIDE, California – A San Bernardino County man pleaded guilty today to fraudulently obtaining more than $2.1 million in COVID-19 pandemic relief funds by submitting 124 fraudulent applications for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits in the names of identity theft victims and California state prisoners who were ineligible for jobless benefits.

Arthur Marquez, 55, of San Bernardino, pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud.

According to his plea agreement, from February 2020 to August 2023, Marquez filed with the California Employment Development Department (EDD) fraudulent applications for UI benefits in other people's names. EDD administers California's unemployment benefits program. In March 2020, Congress established a program, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) to provide UI benefits during the pandemic to qualifying individuals.

The other people whose names Marquez used as part of the scheme included individuals ineligible for UI because they were incarcerated in California state prisons and people whose personal identifying information (PII) was used without their permission.

The fraudulent applications falsely stated that they were individuals whose employment had been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which triggered eligibility for UI benefits under federal law. The applications also falsely stated that the named claimants resided and had worked in California.

As a result of the bogus UI applications that Marquez and his co-schemers filed, EDD authorized Bank of America to issue debit cards in the names of dozens of victims and straw claimants.

In total, Marquez and co-schemers caused at least 124 fraudulent applications for UI benefits to be filed, causing losses to EDD and the United States Treasury of approximately $2,136,768.

United States District Judge Kenly Kiya Kato scheduled a February 18, 2027, sentencing hearing, at which time Marquez will face a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in federal prison.

Co-defendant Lisa Puente, 45, of Rialto, pleaded guilty on September 3 to a felony charge in this case and is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Kato on January 7, 2027.

The United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General; the California Employment Development Department Investigation Division; Homeland Security Investigations; the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General; the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Special Service Unit; the United States Secret Service; the U.S. Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General; and the United States Postal Inspection Service investigated this matter.

Assistant United States Attorney Benjamin J. Weir of the Major Frauds Section is prosecuting this case.

On April 7, the Department of Justice announced the creation of the National Fraud Enforcement Division (Fraud Division). The Fraud Division is laser-focused on 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.

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