

PRESS RELEASE

Kapolei Woman Indicted for Scheme to Defraud Unemployment Insurance and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Programs

Friday, January 24, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Hawaii

HONOLULU, Hawaii – Acting United States Attorney Kenneth M. Sorenson announced that on January 23, 2025, a federal grand jury returned a twelve-count indictment against Phoebe Trinh, also known as Phuong Trinh Ngoc Vo, 31, of Kapolei, Hawaii, charging Trinh with nine counts of wire fraud and three counts of aggravated identity theft in connection with fraudulent claims for unemployment insurance and pandemic unemployment assistance.

The charges in the indictment pertain to both the unemployment insurance and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) programs. In 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act created the PUA program to provide emergency unemployment payments to certain workers whose livelihoods were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but who were ineligible for traditional state unemployment insurance benefits.

The indictment alleges that Trinh submitted a false claim for unemployment insurance benefits to the Hawaii Department of Industrial and Labor Relations (DLIR) using its website, and that she repeatedly falsely certified under penalty of law that she was unemployed and not receiving income, despite knowing that her certifications were false, in order to receive benefit payments that she was not entitled to receive.

The indictment further alleges that Trinh also submitted a claim to the Hawaii DLIR for PUA benefits on behalf of another individual, using that individual's personal identifiable information, including name and social security number, without that individual's knowledge and consent, in order to obtain additional benefit payments to which she was not entitled. Trinh then allegedly repeatedly certified to Hawaii DLIR that the

individual remained eligible for PUA benefit payments in order to receive the payments, without the individual's knowledge and consent. The indictment alleges that Trinh directed Hawaii DLIR to transmit the benefit payments that were intended for the individual to her own bank account.

According to the indictment, Trinh fraudulently obtained at least approximately \$36,265 in unemployment insurance and PUA unemployment benefits to which she was not entitled.

Each of the wire fraud counts carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. Each of the aggravated identity theft counts carries a sentence of two years in prison. An indictment is merely an accusation, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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) at 866-720-5721 or online at www.justice.gov/DisasterComplaintForm.

This case is being investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregg Paris Yates.

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