

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of South Dakota

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, August 12, 2021

Pierre Woman Charged with Wire Fraud, Mail Fraud, and Money Laundering

Acting United States Attorney Dennis R. Holmes announced that a Pierre, South Dakota, woman has been indicted by a federal grand jury for Wire Fraud, Mail Fraud, and Money Laundering.

Marietta Ravnaas, age 52, was indicted on August 3, 2021. She appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark A. Moreno on August 10, 2021, and pled not guilty to the Indictment.

The maximum penalty upon conviction is up to 20 years in federal prison and/or a \$500,000 fine, three years of supervised release, and up to \$700 to the Federal Crime Victims Fund. Restitution may also be ordered.

The Indictment alleges that Ravnaas participated in a scheme involving CARES Act unemployment benefits. Specifically, other participants in the scheme unlawfully obtained, possessed, and shared with one another the personal identifying information (PII) of various individuals. The PII was used to falsely and fraudulently apply for unemployment benefits from various states. The Indictment alleges that Ravnaas knowingly allowed the fraudulently obtained unemployment benefits payments to be deposited into her bank account, and then transferred money at the direction of other participants in the scheme. Ravnaas frequently transferred the funds to other participants using WorldRemit, an international money transfer service. Ravnaas also kept some of the funds to use for her own purposes.

The charges are merely accusations and Ravnaas is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

The investigation is being conducted by the Social Security Administration-Office of the Inspector General, the Department of Labor-Office of the Inspector General, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, and the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Ann M. Hoffman is prosecuting the case.

Ravnaas was released on bond pending trial. A trial date has been set for October 12, 2021.

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

Component(s):
USAO - South Dakota