

PRESS RELEASE

Sacramento Woman Pleads Guilty to Participation in Nearly \$2.6 Million COVID-19 Benefit Fraud Scheme

Thursday, February 13, 2025

For Immediate Release

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

SACRAMENTO, Calif. —Tabitha Leigh Markle, 53, of Sacramento, pleaded guilty today to mail fraud and aggravated identity theft in a scheme to defraud the unemployment insurance benefit program during the COVID-19 pandemic, Acting U.S. Attorney Michele Beckwith announced.

According to court documents, between April 2020 and January 2021, Markle defrauded the California Employment Development Department (EDD) and the United States out of unemployment insurance benefits. Markle collected personally identifiable information (PII) including names, dates of birth, Social Security numbers and other information, and submitted fraudulent applications for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits to EDD. Markle and her associates caused the UI debit cards to be mailed to addresses she listed in the fraudulent applications. They used the cards that were issued in the names of the supposed beneficiaries to withdraw cash from ATMs throughout California. Markle and her associates often appeared in ATM surveillance photos taking out large amounts of cash from the cards. Markle and her criminal associates obtained approximately \$2,599,038 from the fraud.

Markle also used the means of identification of various victims, including N.T., who was a resident of Oakland. Without N.T.'s knowledge or permission, Markle filed a false unemployment insurance application with California EDD using N.T.'s true name and other identifying information, but using a false email address, phone number and mailing address. Markle's associates withdrew thousands of dollars of unemployment insurance benefits from the card issued to N.T.

This case is the product of an investigation by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Office of Inspector General, California EDD – Investigation Division, and the

United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General. Assistant U.S. Attorney Christina McCall is prosecuting the case.

Markle is scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Judge Troy L. Nunley on May 13, 2025. Markle faces a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine (or twice the amount of the loss) for mail fraud, plus supervised release of up to five years. She also faces a mandatory two-year consecutive prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 for aggravated identity theft. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the Court after consideration of any applicable statutory factors and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables.

This effort is part of a California COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Strike Force operation, one of five interagency COVID-19 fraud strike force teams established by the U.S. Department of Justice. The California Strike Force combines law enforcement and prosecutorial resources in the Eastern and Central Districts of California and focuses on large-scale, multistate pandemic relief fraud perpetrated by criminal organizations and transnational actors. The strike forces use prosecutor-led and data analyst-driven teams to identify and bring to justice those who stole pandemic relief funds.

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