



Department of Justice

Office of the United States Attorney
Eastern District of California
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, June 25, 2019
www.justice.gov/edca
Docket #: 2:18-cr-058 JAM

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**STOCKTON MAN SENTENCED TO OVER 6 YEARS IN PRISON FOR UNEMPLOYMENT
BENEFITS FRAUD AND IDENTITY THEFT**

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — John Michael Herron II, 38, of Stockton, was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge John A. Mendez to six years and three months in prison for conspiracy to commit mail fraud and identity theft, U.S. Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced.

According to court documents, from at least December 2014 through January 2018, Herron participated in a scheme to defraud the State of California Employment Development Department (EDD) by filing fraudulent claims for unemployment insurance benefits. In furtherance of this scheme, Herron and his co-defendant, Robert Maher, formerly of Stockton, created fictitious companies and fictitious employees (by using the real identities of persons with and without their knowledge), and filed claims with EDD, falsely stating that the employees had been laid off or fired. The unemployment benefits were deposited onto debit cards that were mailed to addresses controlled by Herron, Maher, or their associates. ATM cameras captured Herron withdrawing unemployment benefit funds using a debit card registered to an identity theft victim. Herron was connected to approximately \$578,185 in fraudulent claims to EDD, of which approximately \$485,685 was paid out by EDD.

“John Michael Herron II conspired with his co-defendant to defraud EDD by filing for unemployment insurance benefits in the names of identity theft victims who were not entitled to such benefits. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners and state workforce agencies to protect the integrity of unemployment insurance benefit programs,” said Abel Salinas, Special Agent-in-Charge, Los Angeles Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

“Today’s sentencing sends a clear message that fraud will not be tolerated,” said EDD Director Patrick W. Henning. “EDD proudly works alongside our law enforcement partners to safeguard these vital public benefits and pursue aggressive action against fraud whenever possible.”

This case is the product of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the California Employment Development Department's Investigation Division. Assistant U.S. Attorney Amy Schuller Hitchcock is prosecuting the case.

The charges against Maher are pending. The charges are only allegations; he is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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