

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **U.S. Attorney's Office Announces 15 Arrests for Benefit Fraud**

Thursday, June 18, 2026

**For Immediate Release**

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

## **Arrests part of ongoing effort to root out fraud in Massachusetts**

BOSTON – Fifteen individuals, 11 illegal aliens and four U.S. Citizens, have been charged and arrested for benefit fraud in Massachusetts. The defendants are charged with more than \$1.4 million in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit fraud, MassHealth benefit fraud and disability and unemployment benefit fraud, just to name a few.

The following individuals have been charged over the past week. Several defendants' names are currently unknown at this time, as they have been living under stolen identities:

1. Heriberto Rodriguez of Framingham, Mass., is charged with passport fraud, SNAP fraud, and aggravated identity theft in connection with \$546,463 in total benefit fraud loss (\$175,182 in MassHealth fraud; \$146,944 in Social Security fraud; \$185,194 in HUD fraud; and \$39,000 in SNAP fraud);
2. Mirian Chalas, 33, a U.S. Citizen living in Salem N.H., is charged with making false statements in connection with \$266,000 in MassHealth fraud; \$25,000 in Social Security Disability fraud; and \$12,000 in SNAP fraud;
3. Santo Escolastico Cuello, 56, a Dominican national unlawfully living in Worcester, Mass., is charged with aggravated identity theft and making false statements relating to a health care program in connection with \$162,180 in MassHealth fraud;
4. John Doe, age unknown, suspected to be in the United States illegally, is charged with false representation of a Social Security number, aggravated identity theft and making false statements relating to a health care program in connection with MassHealth fraud totaling \$75,000 and aggravated identity theft;
5. John Doe, age unknown, suspected to be in the United States illegally living in Quincy, Mass., is charged with illegal acquisition or use of SNAP benefits, theft of

government funds and aggravated identity theft in connection with SNAP benefit fraud totaling \$11,000;

6. Mario Baez Romero, 45, a Dominican national unlawfully living in Somerville, Mass., is charged with aggravated identity theft and passport fraud in connection with \$26,942 in SNAP fraud and \$48,785 in MassHealth fraud. Baez Romero was allegedly encountered during an interdiction of a recreational vessel near Key Biscayne in Miami, Fla. in May 2026;
7. Richard Odelis Vallegas Nunez, 35, a Dominican national unlawfully living in Allston, Mass., is charged with aggravated identity theft and unlawful production of an identification document in connection with \$48,865 in MassHealth fraud;
8. Miguel Diaz Matos, 54, a Dominican national living in Lynn, Mass., is charged with illegal acquisition or use of SNAP benefits, theft of government funds and aggravated identity theft in connection with \$13,431 in SNAP fraud and \$50,494 in MassHealth fraud;
9. John Doe, age unknown, suspected to be in the United States illegally, is charged with making false statements related to a health care program in connection with \$32,717 in MassHealth fraud;
10. John Doe, age unknown, suspected to be in the United States illegally, living in Lynn, Mass., is charged with aggravated identity theft and making false statements relating to a health care program in connection with \$38,776 in MassHealth fraud;
11. Mitul Patel, 40, an Indian national unlawfully living in Worcester, Mass., is charged with conspiracy to commit visa fraud, in which co-conspirators staged a false armed robbery of a convenience store to allow "victims" such as Patel, to seek U Visas as victims of violent crimes;
12. Santo Tejada Sanchez, 48, a Dominican national unlawfully living in Haverhill, Mass., is charged with aggravated identity theft, theft of government funds and SNAP benefit fraud totaling \$4,054;
13. Jennifer Ferran, 48, a U.S. Citizen living in Haverhill, Mass., is charged with theft of government property, Social Security fraud and furnishing false information to Social Security in connection with over \$29,000 in Social Security fraud;
14. Owen Landry, a/k/a "Oski," 24, a U.S. Citizen living in Haverhill, Mass., is charged with theft of government property, Social Security fraud and furnishing false information to Social Security in connection with over \$29,000 in Social Security fraud; and
15. Yahaira Diaz Gomez, 45, a Dominican national living in Mattapan, Mass., is charged with making false statements relating to a health care program in connection with \$48,694 MassHealth fraud.

*“Today’s announcement is just the beginning of what will be a sustained and ongoing effort to arrest and charge individuals for benefit fraud in Massachusetts. The defendants charged today stole from a number of programs, including SNAP and MassHealth – which are designed to assist U.S. citizens in need of food and health care. They allegedly stole tens of thousands of dollars each in benefits for which they are not entitled,” said U.S. Attorney Leah B. Foley. “There isn’t any place else in the world where you can go and be handed free food, free housing, free healthcare and free monthly checks, while being in the country illegally. However, it appears that you can come to Massachusetts and steal as many benefits as you want without fear and without any accountability. This is all ending on my watch. Beginning today, we will be announcing benefit fraud charges on a rolling basis.”*

“These cases highlight a broader, deeply troubling pattern: the exploitation of America’s safety-net by illegal aliens,” said Assistant Attorney General Colin M. McDonald for the National Fraud Enforcement Division. “Fraud by illegal aliens carries real and substantial costs to American taxpayers and places enormous strain on our public benefits systems. The Fraud Division remains laser-focused on rooting out fraud — whether committed by illegal aliens or anyone else — and recovering money wrongfully taken from the American people.”

“Stealing someone’s identity to rip off unemployment benefits isn’t just breaking the law — it’s stealing from every American who plays by the rules,” said Anthony P. D’Esposito, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor. “We will continue working with the U.S. Attorney’s Office, HSI’s Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force, and our federal and state partners to hunt down these criminals and ensure they pay the price for stealing from hardworking Americans.”

“During this short surge operation, we have uncovered over \$1 million of fraud — but we’re just getting started. In response to rampant fraud in Massachusetts, and with the support of our task force partners and the U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts, we’re redoubling our efforts to root out fraud and bring these criminals to justice,” said Jeffrey Grimming, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England. “HSI is making real progress identifying government

benefits fraudsters, dismantling identity document dealers, and arresting those who steal from taxpayer-funded programs.”

“This investigation determined that several defendants submitted fraudulent SNAP and other benefits applications in the names of stolen identities. Identity theft affects the lives of many people. Our collaborative work to combat this type of fraud and promote the integrity of government programs remains a priority,” said Charmeka Parker, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations – Northeast Region.

“Medicaid enrollment fraud undermines the integrity of our health care system and inflicts real harm on the victims whose personal information is exploited and whose medical records are compromised,” said Roberto Coviello, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General. “Every fraudulent dollar paid out through these schemes is a dollar taken from those who are truly entitled to these benefits—and we will not allow that theft to go unanswered.”

The charge of SNAP fraud of over \$5,000 provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of SNAP fraud of over \$100 provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of passport fraud provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of unlawful production of an identification document provides for a sentence of up to 15 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of conspiracy to commit visa fraud provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of theft of government funds provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of Social Security fraud provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss, whichever is greater. The charge of making false statements to federal officials provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of making false statements relating to a health care program provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of furnishing false information to Social Security provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss, whichever is greater. The charge of aggravated identity theft provides for a mandatory two-year sentence to run consecutively to any other sentence imposed, one year of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000.

Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

[On March 26, 2026](#), United States Attorney Leah B. Foley announced the creation of the Benefit & Voter Fraud Team, a district-wide initiative established in response to the rampant fraud being uncovered across Massachusetts. The Team is led by two senior federal prosecutors serving as Fraud Coordinators, whose mission it is to aggressively investigate and prosecute misuse of taxpayer-funded benefits in Massachusetts.

Members of the public are encouraged to report suspected benefit fraud in Massachusetts by calling 1-855-SCAM-MA-1 (855-722-6621).

On April 7, 2026, the Department of Justice announced the creation of the [National Fraud Enforcement Division](#). The Fraud Division is 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.

United States Attorney Leah B. Foley; Assistant Attorney General Colin M. McDonald for the National Fraud Enforcement Division; Anthony P. D'Esposito, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor; Jeffrey Grimming, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England; Charmeka Parker, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations – Northeast Region; and Roberto Coviello, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General made the announcement today.

The details contained in the charging document are allegations. The defendants are presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in the court of law.

*Updated June 18, 2026*