

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Central District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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8 Arrested on Federal Indictment Alleging Scheme to Obtain \$1.1 Million in Unemployment Benefits Through Sham Companies

LOS ANGELES – Law enforcement today arrested eight individuals named in a federal grand jury indictment charging them with creating nonexistent businesses and then claiming more than \$1.1 million in unemployment benefits for purported employees of those fake businesses.

The nine-count indictment unsealed today alleges a three-year conspiracy to cheat the state's unemployment insurance program through the creation of bogus cleaning services and boutique stores, sometimes using the names of prison inmates as phony employees with which to collect the benefits.

The indictment charges each of the eight defendants with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. Those named in the indictment are:

- Donna Givens, 58, of the Gramercy Park area of the City of Los Angeles;
- Catrina Gipson, 44, of Moreno Valley, who is Givens' niece;
- Evelyn Taylor, 36, of Gramercy Park, a daughter of Givens;
- Laron Taylor, 34, of Buena Park, a son of Givens;
- Latrice Taylor, 37, of Buena Park, a daughter of Givens;
- Raschell Taylor, 30, of San Bernardino, a daughter of Givens;
- Bianka Logie, 45, of Moreno Valley; and
- Vernisha Jolivet, 27, of Indianapolis.

Seven of the defendants are expected to be arraigned this afternoon in United States District Court. Jolivet was arrested in Indianapolis and will be making a court appearance in Indiana on Wednesday.

From February 2013 until July 2016, the defendants allegedly registered fake businesses with the California Employment Development Department, the administrator of the federal unemployment insurance benefit program for the state. The names of the bogus companies included Latasha's Devining Cleaning Service, Charm Boutique, and Infinite Cleaning Service, according to the indictment. Givens, Laron Taylor, and Raschell Taylor allegedly opened and maintained post office boxes responsible for receiving the fake businesses' mail.

Logie, Jolivet, and Evelyn Taylor filed claims for unemployment insurance in their own names, claiming unemployment from the fake businesses created by the co-conspirators, the indictment alleges. Other times, the conspirators allegedly filed unemployment insurance claims using the names of other people, including prison inmates.

After being supplied California EDD-funded debit cards, the defendants allegedly withdrew funds from the cards that were in the name of other claimants. In total, the defendants fraudulently obtained approximately \$1,106,282 in unemployment insurance benefits, according to the indictment.

An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

If convicted of all charges, each defendant would face a statutory maximum sentence of 22 years in federal prison.

This matter was investigated by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General and California EDD Investigation Division, with assistance from the United States Postal Inspection Service and U.S. Marshals Service.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Puneet V. Kakkar of the International Narcotics, Money Laundering, and Racketeering Section.