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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 5, 2017

**LAKE COUNTY WOMAN SENTENCED TO 4 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON FOR  
DEFRAUDING THE STATE OF ILLINOIS OUT OF \$6.8 MILLION IN UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS**

CHICAGO — A Lake County woman was sentenced today to four years in federal prison for defrauding the State of Illinois out of nearly \$7 million in unemployment benefits.

LETICIA GARCIA assisted hundreds of individuals, mostly undocumented immigrants, in preparing and filing unemployment insurance claims that Garcia knew contained false information, such as invalid Social Security numbers, false assertions of U.S. citizenship, and phony dependents. As a result of the fraudulent claims, the Illinois Department of Employment Security paid out approximately \$6.8 million in unemployment benefits to hundreds of ineligible claimants.

Garcia, 54, of Round Lake Beach, pleaded guilty earlier this year to three counts of mail fraud. U.S. District Judge Edmond E. Chang imposed the sentence in federal court in Chicago.

The sentence was announced by Joel R. Levin, Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; and James Vanderberg, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General in Chicago. The Illinois Department of Employment Security and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations provided valuable assistance.

“Defendant committed wholesale fraud against a state program designed to help some of the most vulnerable state residents get back on their feet after an unexpected job loss,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Nicholas Eichenseer argued in the government’s sentencing memorandum. “Her crime diminished the resources available to eligible UI claimants who played by the rules.”

“Garcia defrauded taxpayers of millions of dollars by assisting hundreds of ineligible workers in their efforts to receive unemployment insurance benefits intended for Americans who were out of work,” said Special Agent-in-Charge Vanderberg. “The Office of Inspector General will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate those who attempt to fraudulently obtain money from Department of Labor Programs.”

Many of Garcia’s clients were Mexican-born immigrants without lawful immigration status or U.S. work permits, making them ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. From 2006 through May 2012, Garcia operated an office out of a converted garage in her home, where she and her employees saw as many as 15 clients per day. It was understood that Garcia would not ask clients for immigration papers.

Garcia charged each client \$300 to \$400 to prepare and file a claim online, with half of the fee due upfront and the balance owed when the client received the benefits. Through her fraud, Garcia made tens of thousands of dollars, which she hid in bank accounts in her daughter’s name.

The government is represented by Mr. Eichenseer.

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