

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Eastern District of Missouri

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Missouri State Employee Accused of Stealing \$140,000 in Unemployment Insurance Funds

ST. LOUIS – A Missouri state employee has been indicted on three federal felony charges and accused of using her position to send about \$140,500 in unearned unemployment benefits to friends, relatives and others.

According to the indictment, Vicky Hefner, 63, of Jefferson County, Missouri, began work with Missouri's Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, Division of Employment Security as a benefit program specialist in 2009. She worked out of her home and an office in St. Louis helping people file their claims over the phone and adjudicating issues people were having with unemployment claims.

From July to December of 2020, Hefner logged into the accounts of multiple friends, relatives or associates, the indictment says. She changed their status and used her credentials in ways that either made them eligible for unemployment benefits or increased their benefits, the indictment says,

She also triggered unemployment payments to people who were still working, the indictment says. Hefner's friends and relatives then paid her kickbacks, the indictment says.

Hefner was indicted by a federal grand jury on September 28 on three charges of theft of public money. She pleaded not guilty to the charges last week. Each charge carries a potential penalty of up to 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. If convicted, Hefner will also be ordered to repay the money.

Charges set forth in an indictment are merely accusations and do not constitute proof of guilt. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The case was investigated by the Office of Inspector General at both the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Labor. Assistant U.S. Attorney Edward Dowd III is prosecuting the case.

Topic(s):
Public Corruption
Financial Fraud

Component(s):
USAO - Missouri, Eastern