

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Burtonsville Woman Pleads Guilty to Federal Unemployment Insurance Fraud Charges**

Tuesday, December 23, 2025

**For Immediate Release**

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

**Baltimore, Maryland** – Vanessa Valdez, 42, of Burtonsville, Maryland, pled guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in connection with an unemployment insurance (UI) fraud scheme.

Kelly O. Hayes, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the guilty plea with Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer, National Capital Region, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), and Acting Special Agent in Charge Evan Campanella, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) – Maryland.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act — a federal law enacted in March 2020 — provided emergency financial assistance to Americans suffering from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also authorized increased UI benefits.

According to public documents, beginning in at least May 2020, and continuing through at least September 2021, Valdez, and other co-conspirators, engaged in a conspiracy and scheme to defraud and obtain money by means of materially false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises, in connection with an UI fraud scheme.

Specifically, Valdez and her co-conspirators used personal identifiable information (PII) of others to submit false and fraudulent claims to the Maryland Department of Labor (MD-DOL) for UI benefits. Valdez, along with her co-conspirators, then used the UI benefits, which were designated to assist unemployed or underemployed persons due to the COVID-19 national emergency, for their own personal enrichment.

As a part of her guilty plea, Valdez also admitted to fraudulently obtaining Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) funds.

Established by the CARES Act, the PPP — administered through the Small Business Administration — along with the EIDL, helped businesses meet their financial obligations. An EIDL advance does not have to be repaid, and small businesses can receive an advance, even if they are not approved for an EIDL loan. The maximum advance amount is \$10,000.

Valdez faces a maximum sentence of 22 years in federal prison, including and a mandatory two years, consecutive to any other imposed sentence, for aggravated identity theft. A sentencing date is forthcoming.

U.S. Attorney Hayes commended the DOL-OIG and HSI Maryland for their work in the investigation. Ms. Hayes also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Philip Motsay who prosecuted the case.

The District of Maryland Strike Force is one of five strike forces established throughout the United States by the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute COVID-19 fraud, including fraud relating to the CARES Act. Strike forces focus on large-scale, multi-state pandemic relief fraud perpetrated by criminal organizations and transnational actors. The strike forces are interagency law enforcement efforts that use prosecutor-led and data-analyst-driven teams designed to identify and bring to justice those who stole pandemic relief funds.

For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>. Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

For more information about the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to report fraud, visit [justice.gov/usao-md](https://justice.gov/usao-md) and [justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach](https://justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach)

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