

## PRESS RELEASE

# Former Amtrak Employee Sentenced to Over 2 Years in Prison for Crimes, Including Near-\$1 Million COVID Jobless Benefits Fraud

Thursday, July 17, 2025

### For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California

*LOS ANGELES* – A former Amtrak employee was sentenced today to 25 months in federal prison for conspiring with her husband to steal nearly \$1 million in COVID-19 pandemic-related unemployment insurance (UI) benefits and for fraudulently obtaining more than \$63,000 in sickness benefits while she worked at the passenger railroad company.

Lizette Berrios Lathon, 48, of Moreno Valley, was sentenced by United States District Judge Fernando M. Olguin, who also ordered her to pay \$1,061,667 in restitution.

In November 2022, Lizette Lathon pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud and wire fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft, and one count of wire fraud.

Previously, in July 2024, Judge Olguin sentenced Lathon's husband, Kenneth Andrew Lathon, 50, also of Moreno Valley, to 54 months in federal prison and ordered him to pay \$998,630 in restitution.

Kenneth Lathon pleaded guilty in November 2022 to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud and wire fraud, one count of aggravated identity theft, and one count of unlawful possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

From 2014 until at least September 2022, Lizette Lathon, in addition to her one-time duties as a service attendant for Amtrak, operated at least three tax preparation businesses: Miracle Tax Service, which was located on Los Angeles' Miracle Mile; Hardcore Corp., which did business as "Hardcore Taxes"; and Lathon LLC, which did business as "LL Taxes." The latter two companies were in Moreno Valley.

Lathon and her husband took advantage of the expanded eligibility for UI benefits made possible by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act signed into law in 2020. The CARES Act also established the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, which provided additional UI benefits to qualified individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic, including people who did not otherwise qualify for UI such as business owners, self-employed workers, independent contractors, and those with a limited work history.

In some instances, Lizette Lathon submitted fraudulent applications with the California Employment Development Department (EDD) for UI benefits using names, Social Security numbers, and dates of birth that she obtained from former clients of her tax preparation businesses without the permission of those former clients. On the applications, she falsely asserted inflated income for the named claimants – many of whom had never lived in California – to receive the maximum benefit amount.

As a result of the fraudulent claims she filed, EDD authorized Bank of America to issue debit cards in the names of Lizette Lathon's former clients, but the cards were mailed to addresses she and her family controlled. She and her husband then used the debit cards to make cash withdrawals at ATMs and to make purchases at retail stores.

During the conspiracy, which lasted from the spring of 2020 until March 2021, Lathon and her husband caused at least 44 fraudulent unemployment claims to be filed, resulting in losses to EDD and the United States Treasury of approximately \$998,630.

Lizette Lathon, who was employed at Amtrak from 2000 to 2021, also schemed to defraud the Railroad Retirement Board out of sickness benefit payments by filing forged and false claims that stated she was being treated by a medical professional for pain and anxiety. Through this scheme, which lasted from September 2014 to January 2020, she fraudulently obtained approximately \$63,047 in sickness benefit payments.

Kenneth Lathon possessed a .22-caliber rifle and 12-gauge shotgun despite his criminal history, which includes felony convictions in California state court for theft, cocaine possession, and fraud.

These matters were investigated by the Amtrak Office of Inspector General; the United States Railroad Retirement Board Office of Inspector General; the United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General; the United States Department of Labor Employee Benefits Security Administration; the California Employment Development Department; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Homeland Security Investigations; and the United States Postal Inspection Service.

Assistant United States Attorney Cory L. Burleson of the Riverside Branch Office prosecuted these cases.

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 Hotline at (866) 720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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