

PRESS RELEASE

Wesley Chapel Woman Convicted Of Stealing Almost \$2 Million In Unemployment Insurance Benefits And Identity Theft Of Over 100 Victims

Friday, June 20, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida

Tampa, FL – United States Attorney Gregory W. Kehoe announces that a federal jury has found Maria Morales (58, Wesley Chapel) guilty of trafficking in unauthorized access devices and aggravated identity theft. Maria Morales faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison. Her sentencing hearing is scheduled for September 19, 2025. Maria Morales was indicted on September 4, 2024.

According to testimony and evidence presented at trial, Morales received over 100 debit cards issued by the state of Nevada for unemployment insurance benefits distributed during the COVID pandemic. Each of these debit cards was created using personal identifying information of unwitting individuals from all over the United States. The debit cards mailed to Morales had the names of those individuals on both the debit cards and the envelope in which the cards were mailed. Upon receipt, Morales traveled to various ATMs in the Middle District of Florida and withdrew thousands of dollars in unemployment insurance benefits. In less than one year, Morales received almost \$2 million in unemployment insurance benefits to which she was never entitled. In so doing, she stole the identity of over 100 individuals.

This case was investigated by the Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Candace Garcia Rich.

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