

AG Initiative to Investigate Unemployment Fraud Results in 20 Cases Against Individuals Across 10 Counties Suspected of Collectively Stealing More Than \$1.1 Million

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[Office of the Attorney General](#)

– Matthew J. Platkin, *Attorney General*

[Division of Criminal Justice](#)

– J. Stephen Ferketic, *Director*

TRENTON — Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin and the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) today announced a multi-month initiative to investigate and prosecute unemployment fraud, which resulted in cases against 20 defendants, who allegedly stole over \$1.1 million collectively from New Jersey’s unemployment insurance trust fund.

The cases are the result of cooperative investigations by the DCJ Worker Protection and Fair Labor Enforcement Unit and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Inspector General. Over a two-month period, DCJ charged 20 cases in which individuals allegedly collected state and federal unemployment benefits to which they were not entitled. In some instances, identity theft was committed, and benefits were collected in someone else’s name.

The charged defendants each allegedly stole anywhere from \$13,000 to nearly \$100,000. Although the cases against each individual are distinct, collectively these defendants allegedly stole over \$1.1 million in unemployment benefits.

“Unemployment insurance fraud directly affects taxpayers in New Jersey, as well as those who rely on this program during times of need,” **said Attorney General Platkin**. “We are dedicated to protecting these programs from fraud, ensuring that they remain available to those who truly need it.”

“The Division of Criminal Justice is committed to protecting the State’s Treasury and the critical programs that it funds,” **said J. Stephen Ferketic, Director of DCJ**. “We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that this type of fraud is vigorously investigated and prosecuted.”

“An important part of the mission of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations of fraud related to unemployment insurance programs. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of allegations,” **said Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent-in-Charge, Northeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Inspector General**.

Three defendants face second-degree theft by deception charges. The remaining 17 defendants were charged with third-degree theft by deception, two of which face additional charges for

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third-degree theft of identity and/or third-degree tampering with public records. The defendants live in 10 counties statewide.

These charges are merely accusations and all defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

Unemployment insurance benefits are available to individuals who have lost their jobs. The New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development (NJDOL), under the leadership of Commissioner Rob Asaro-Angelo, uses various tools to prevent fraudulent payments from ever being made, and to recover fraudulent payments when they do occur. As part of its fraud prevention efforts, the NJDOL routinely makes criminal referrals to the Division of Criminal Justice.

A conviction of a third-degree offense can result in three to five years in prison and fines up to \$15,000. A conviction of a second-degree offense can result in five to 10 years of imprisonment, and fines up to \$150,000. The potential sentences are provided solely for informational purposes, as any potential sentence is determined by a judge.

Deputy Attorneys General Jacob Brown and Gezim Bajrami are prosecuting the cases for the Division of Criminal Justice Worker Protection and Fair Labor Enforcement Unit, under the supervision of Deputy Bureau Chief Brian Carney and Deputy Director Theresa Hilton.

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