

PRESS RELEASE

Alabama Woman Sentenced To 18 Months' Imprisonment For COVID-19 Unemployment Insurance Fraud Scheme

Wednesday, July 24, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Tennessee

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. - On July 24, 2024, Meghan Pittman, 29, of Stevenson, Alabama, was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment by the Honorable Curtis L. Collier, United States District Judge, in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Following her imprisonment, she will be on supervised release for five years.

As part of the plea agreement filed with the court, Pittman pled guilty to wire fraud, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1343 for her involvement in a scheme to defraud COVID-19 unemployment programs in several states. In addition, Pittman was ordered to pay \$85,011 in restitution to the Pennsylvania and California Departments of Labor, and to forfeit to the United States \$85,011 as part of a money judgment.

According to court documents, from June 2020 through June 2021, Pittman conspired with others to devise a scheme in which she defrauded the United States government and the governments of Tennessee, Alabama, Pennsylvania, and California to obtain money from the states' COVID relief programs in the form of unemployment insurance proceeds funded by the United States government. Specifically, Pittman acquired personal information from others and used it to fraudulently make mass online applications for money earmarked by the states to provide unemployment insurance relief for those affected by the national pandemic. She falsely claimed in the applications that the individuals whose personal information was reflected on the applications worked in those states. The states then mailed debit cards to addresses in the Eastern District of Tennessee, and Pittman would receive a percentage of the payout

of the fraudulent claim. The defendant was personally responsible for the fraudulent distribution of over \$85,000 of unemployment protection insurance funds. The scheme itself involved the fraudulent distribution of over \$550,000 in unemployment protection insurance funds.

United States Attorney Francis M. Hamilton III, of the Eastern District of Tennessee, Mathew Broadhurst, Special Agent-in-Charge, Southeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, and Special Agent in Charge Joseph E. Carrico of the Federal Bureau of Investigation made the announcement.

Assistant United States Attorney Steven Neff represented the United States.

The conviction was the result of an investigation conducted by the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General and the FBI as part of the Smoky Mountains Financial Crimes Task Force.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across the government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. 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>.

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