



# Department of Justice

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Docket #: 2:17-cr-060-MCE

## **FIRST DEFENDANT SENTENCED TO 2.5 YEARS IN PRISON FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FRAUD AND IDENTITY THEFT SCHEME**

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Brittany Maunakea, 29, of Manteca, was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Morrison C. England Jr. to two and a half years in prison for conspiracy to commit mail fraud for her role in a scheme to defraud the State of California by filing false unemployment insurance claims, U.S. Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced. Maunakea was also ordered to pay \$139,071 in restitution.

According to court documents, beginning in February 2015, Maunakea entered a scheme to defraud the State of California by filing false unemployment insurance claims with the California Employment Development Department (EDD), using the stolen identities of over 250 California workers. In total, the conspirators filed at least 269 false claims seeking over \$2.5 million in fraudulent benefits. EDD's actual overpayment was \$898,899. Maunakea participated in the scheme by receiving and facilitating EDD documents at her home and using debit cards issued in the names of identity-theft victims to withdraw the fraudulently obtained benefits.

“Ms. Maunakea’s crime victimized citizens whose stolen identities were used in furtherance of her personal enrichment. The Office of Inspector General will continue to make it a priority to work with our law enforcement and state workforce agency partners to protect the integrity of the Unemployment Insurance program and to seek justice on behalf of the victims of these identity theft schemes,” said Abel Salinas, Special Agent-in-Charge, Los Angeles Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

This case is the product of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the California Employment

Development Department, Investigations Division. Assistant U.S. Attorney Amy Schuller Hitchcock is prosecuting the case.

Maunakea is the first of five defendants charged in the scheme to be sentenced. Co-defendant Sergio Reyna has also pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit mail fraud and is set to be sentenced on September 6, 2018. The charges against co-defendants Pamela Emanuel, Gregory Lee, and Russell White III remain pending. The charges against Emanuel, Lee and White are only allegations; the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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