PRESS RELEASE

Georgia Sisters Plead Guilty to Roles in $2M Pandemic Benefits Fraud Scheme

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For Immediate Release
U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Ohio

CLEVELAND – Two Georgia women have pleaded guilty to their roles in a scheme to defraud the federal government by causing pandemic unemployment benefit funds to be paid on ineligible claims that had been held or denied for suspected fraud.

Sisters Joirean Creel, 35, of Duluth, and Adriane Creel, 24, of Stone Mountain, pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud and Honest Services Wire Fraud. U.S. Magistrate Judge Jonathan D. Greenberg accepted their guilty pleas Aug. 31.

According to allegations in court documents, the defendants were both hired to work as remote teleservices representatives through a subcontractor for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). The agency administered Ohio’s unemployment insurance program, which included federally funded unemployment benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of their jobs, the defendants were given access to an online system to process and manage unemployment benefits for the claimants. They were supposed to use the system only for their job providing customer service to claimants by phone. Instead, the two women abused their positions and system access to solicit and accept bribes and kickbacks that caused $1.96 million in benefits to be paid. However, the claims paid had been previously flagged as suspected of being fraudulent. The defendants used their system access to nullify and void the suspected fraudulent claims even though they were not authorized to do so. They also fraudulently obtained additional unemployment benefits for themselves by submitting applications in their own names. The defendants submitted their applications to other states including New York, Pennsylvania, and Nevada, despite being employed to help ODJFS administer the unemployment insurance system. In addition, investigators discovered that Joirean Creel was also employed by the U.S. Postal Service while claiming to be unemployed.

During the investigation, law enforcement seized and forfeited a Mercedes Benz GL450. In total, ODJFS lost more than $2 million as a result of the conspiracy.

This investigation was led by the U.S. Department of Labor-Office of Inspector General, the FBI Cleveland Division, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service Pittsburgh Division-Cleveland Field Office.

The Department of Justice has created the National Fraud Enforcement Division. The core mission of the Fraud Division is to zealously investigate and prosecute those who steal or fraudulently misuse taxpayer dollars. Department of Justice efforts to combat fraud support President Trump’s Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, a whole-of-government effort chaired by Vice President J.D. Vance to eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse within Federal benefit programs.

Assistant United States Attorneys **Elliot Morrison** and **Erica Barnhill** for the Northern District of Ohio lead the prosecution.

Contact

Jessica Salas Novak

Jessica.Salas.Novak@usdoj.gov

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