

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of Iowa

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, April 4, 2022

Hampton, Iowa Woman Pleads Guilty to COVID-19 Related Unemployment Fraud

Mendenhall received over \$35,000 in fraudulently obtained benefits.

A Hampton, Iowa woman who received unemployment benefits in other people's names pled guilty on March 24, 2022, in federal court in Sioux City.

Stephanie Mendenhall, age 53, from Hampton, Iowa was convicted of four counts of theft of government funds and one count of money laundering conspiracy. At a plea hearing, Mendenhall admitted making false claims in the names of others, and depositing the resulting proceeds into her bank account. Mendenhall received fraudulent unemployment benefits paid through the states of Maine, Michigan, Washington, and Illinois, including benefits related to COVID-19 relief funds, to which she was not entitled. Mendenhall received at least \$35,985 in false unemployment benefits.

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 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>.

Sentencing before United States District Court Chief Judge Leonard T. Strand will be set after a presentence report is prepared. Mendenhall remains free on bond previously set pending sentencing. Mendenhall faces a possible maximum sentence of 60 years' imprisonment, a \$1,500,000 fine, and 3 years of supervised release following any imprisonment.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Ron Timmons and Tim Vavricek, and was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General.

Court file information at <https://ecf.iand.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/login.pl>.

The case file number is 21-3028.

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