



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

PRESS RELEASE

No Amount Too Small, No Fraud Too Large — And Counting: \$200 Million Labor Trafficking Ring, COVID Fraudsters, and Identity Thieves Sentenced in OIG Federal Crackdown

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General is sending an unambiguous message to fraudsters, traffickers, and bad actors across the country: we are coming for you and there will be consequences. Working alongside President Donald Trump and Vice President Vance’s Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, Inspector General Anthony P. D’Esposito is delivering on that promise — holding criminals accountable, recovering taxpayer dollars, and ensuring DOL programs serve the Americans they were designed to help, not those who seek to exploit them. These programs are not a safe haven for criminals, and we will defend them fiercely.

WAYCROSS, GA. — Three defendants (Margarita Rojas Cardenas, Nery Rene Carrillo-Najarro, and Brett Donovan Bussey) were collectively sentenced to 101 months in prison on federal conspiracy charges following a transnational, multi-year human smuggling and labor trafficking investigation. The operation illegally transported Mexican and Central American workers into brutal conditions on South Georgia farms. It allegedly reaped more than \$200 million, which was laundered through cash purchases of land, homes, vehicles, and businesses; cashier’s checks; and by funneling millions of dollars through a casino. “Federal labor programs are not a playground for criminals. Let these sentencing send a clear message: if you exploit workers, commit fraud, launder money, or abuse programs designed to help people, my office will find you and hold you accountable,” said Anthony P. D’Esposito,

Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor. “This scheme preyed on vulnerable individuals and corrupted a lawful worker program for illegal profit. Alongside our law enforcement partners, we will continue rooting out fraud, protecting American workers, and ensuring bad actors face the full weight of justice.”

ANCHORAGE, AK. — An Alaska man, Christopher Staggs, aka “Christopher Blackburn,” was sentenced to two years in prison, three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution to be determined later, for a scheme to defraud the U.S. government of COVID-19 relief funds. Staggs fraudulently obtained over \$170,000 through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act. Shortly following the passing of the CARES Act in 2020, he began using his Chicago-based business as a front to file false and fraudulent unemployment insurance (UI) applications in Alaska and other states, using the personally identifiable information from individuals who were either completely unaware or believed Staggs was assisting them in applying for UI benefits. “This is exactly why my office exists — to hunt down criminals like Christopher Staggs and make sure they answer for every dollar stolen and every life disrupted. Unemployment insurance fraud is not a victimless crime; it’s stealing from every honest American who plays by the rules. My office will ensure every fraudster pays the price for their despicable crimes against the American taxpayer,” Inspector General D’Esposito added.

EUGENE, OR. — Jamianne MacKenzie of Oregon was sentenced to three months in federal prison, three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay more than \$30,000 in restitution for fraudulently obtaining unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. MacKenzie used personally identifiable information of a victim to fraudulently apply for over \$27,500 in UI benefits, which she used for personal expenses. The victim was unable to receive more than \$2,500 in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits after the Oregon Department of Human Services was notified that a claim was filed under the victim’s Social Security number months earlier. “Jamianne MacKenzie stole more than \$27,000 in unemployment insurance benefits by abusing victim’s personal identities. She not only enriched herself at the taxpayers’ expense but also prevented an innocent American from accessing critical assistance. This sentence sends a clear message: If you commit fraud and steal from families in need, there will be a prison sentence waiting for you,” said Inspector General D’Esposito.

For additional information on DOL OIG, please visit oig.dol.gov. If you suspect wrongdoing involving DOL programs or operations, contact the DOL-OIG Hotline at (800) 347-3756 or oig.dol.gov/hotlinecontact.htm.

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