

PRESS RELEASE

# Previously Deported Mexican National Sentenced To 27 Months' Imprisonment For Covid-19 Related Fraud And Identity Theft Offenses

Tuesday, June 6, 2023

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Pennsylvania

SCRANTON- The United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania announced that on June 2, 2023, Pedro Hernandez-Romero, age 30, a citizen of Mexico, was sentenced to 27 months' imprisonment and a one-year term of supervised release, by United States District Court Judge Robert D. Mariani, for the crimes of aggravated identity theft, social security account number fraud and illegal reentry of a previously removed alien.

According to United States Attorney Gerard M. Karam, on July 9, 2020, Hernandez-Romero, a previously deported alien, using the name, date of birth, and social security number of a U.S. citizen, applied for and ultimately received \$25,176 in Pennsylvania Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits to which he was not entitled. Further investigation revealed that, using the same stolen identity, Hernandez-Romero applied for and received \$1,950 in traditional unemployment benefits. At his sentencing, Hernandez-Romero was also ordered to pay \$27,134.00 in restitution to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.

This matter was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations (IRS-CI) and by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations. Assistant United States Attorney Jeffery St John prosecuted the case.

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>.

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