PRESS RELEASE

Silver Spring Woman Sentenced to More Than Three Years in Federal Prison for Role in COVID Fraud Scheme

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

Baltimore, Maryland – A Maryland woman received a federal-prison term, today, for her role in an unemployment insurance (UI) fraud conspiracy.

District Judge Matthew J. Maddox sentenced Elizabeth Maria Ceballos, 50, of Silver Spring, to 40 months in federal prison, followed by two years of supervised release, for conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft charges in connection with the scheme. Judge Maddox also ordered Ceballos to pay $638,889 in restitution. This prosecution is part of the Trump Administration’s Task Force to Eliminate Fraud

Kelly O. Hayes, U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the sentence with Inspector General Anthony P. D’Esposito, U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General, (DOL-OIG), and Special Agent in Charge Akil Baldwin of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) – Maryland.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act — a federal law enacted in March 2020 — provided emergency financial assistance to Americans suffering from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also authorized increased UI benefits.

According to public documents, beginning in at least May 2020, and continuing through at least September 2021, Ceballos, and co-conspirator Vanessa Valdez, 42, of Burtonsville, Maryland, engaged in a conspiracy and scheme to defraud and obtain money by means of materially false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises, in connection with an UI fraud scheme. Specifically, Ceballos received money in exchange for fabricating false tax documents that were filed in support of fraudulent UI benefits claims submitted to the Maryland Department of Labor (MD-DOL).

As a part of her guilty plea, Ceballos also admitted assisting Valdez with fraud related to Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) funds. Established by the CARES Act, the PPP — administered through the Small Business Administration — along with the EIDL, helped businesses meet their financial obligations. An EIDL advance does not have to be repaid, and small businesses can receive an advance, even if they are not approved for an EIDL loan. The maximum advance amount is $10,000.

In December 2025, Valdez also pled guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. A sentencing date for Valdez is forthcoming.

U.S. Attorney Hayes commended the DOL-OIG and HSI Maryland, for their work in the investigation. Ms. Hayes also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Philip Motsay who prosecuted the case.

On April 7, the Department of Justice announced the creation of the National Fraud Enforcement Division ("Fraud Division"). The Fraud Division is laser-focused on investigating and prosecuting those who commit fraud against the American people. The Department's work to combat fraud supports 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.

For more information about the Department's response to the pandemic, visit 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 justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form.

For more information about the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to report fraud, please visit justice.gov/usao-md and justice.gov/usao-md/report-fraud.

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