

PRESS RELEASE

Third Georgia State Representative Pleads Guilty to Pandemic Unemployment Fraud

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia

ATLANTA - Sharon Henderson, a suspended member of the Georgia House of Representatives, pled guilty today in federal court to making false statements to fraudulently obtain thousands of dollars of emergency pandemic-era unemployment assistance payments.

"While running for and holding political office, Representative Henderson was fleecing taxpayers, lying to steal money from federal programs intended to help people who lost their jobs due to the pandemic," said U.S. Attorney Theodore S. Hertzberg. "Her prosecution and conviction demonstrate that elected officials who enrich themselves through fraud will be held accountable for violating the public's trust."

"Sharon Henderson, while holding elected office in the Georgia House of Representatives, illegally obtained taxpayer-funded unemployment benefits that were intended to provide financial assistance to workers who lost their jobs through no fault of their own," said Nigel Lange, Inspector General for the State of Georgia. "Our office remains committed to investigating and holding accountable those who misuse public funds and defraud American taxpayers."

"Sharon Henderson was elected to serve the people of Georgia—not steal from them," said Anthony P. D'Esposito, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor. "By exploiting her position for personal gain, she violated the public's trust and undermined the integrity of our institutions. Public officials who betray the American people and abuse their power for personal benefit will be held fully accountable for their despicable actions. No one is above the law. My office will aggressively investigate those who dare to exploit public trust and defraud the American people."

"Pandemic relief programs were created to help Americans facing genuine hardship—not to enrich those willing to lie for personal gain," said Marlo Graham, Special Agent in Charge of FBI Atlanta. "When an elected official abuses taxpayer-funded programs

through fraud, it undermines public confidence in both government institutions and the integrity of public service. The FBI and our law enforcement partners will continue to investigate and hold accountable anyone who exploits federal programs for personal benefit.”

According to U.S. Attorney Hertzberg, the charges, and other information presented in court: In 2020, in response to unprecedented economic hardship resulting from the COVID-19 emergency, Congress created special unemployment compensation programs to provide cash assistance to individuals who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Applicants had to provide their recent work histories and confirm, among other things, that COVID-19 was the reason they were unemployed. Applicants also had to provide a weekly certification attesting that they were actively seeking work and providing the reason they were unemployed.

In June 2020, while a candidate for a seat in the Georgia House of Representatives, Henderson applied for federal pandemic unemployment benefits, claiming that her current employer was Henry County Schools. However, Henderson had not worked for Henry County Schools for almost two years. Before that, she had only worked for five days as a substitute teacher. Additionally, when she worked those five days in 2018, Henderson signed an acknowledgment that noted substitute teachers were not eligible to draw unemployment wages.

Nevertheless, in her unemployment benefits application, Henderson falsely stated that she had worked for the school system throughout 2019 and as recently as March 10, 2020; that she had paystubs as evidence of that employment; and that her place of employment was closed as a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency. She then submitted fraudulent weekly certifications claiming that she was unable to reach her place of employment because of a COVID-19 quarantine. She filed eight of those fraudulent certifications in June 2021, after she was sworn in and serving as the state representative for District 113, which covers western Newton County and part of Covington, Georgia.

Henderson fraudulently collected \$17,811 of pandemic unemployment benefits as a result of the false statements in her application and weekly certifications.

Sharon Henderson, 67, of Covington, Georgia, pled guilty this morning to making false statements to obtain funds administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. Sentencing is scheduled for November 3, 2026, at 10:00 a.m., before U.S. District Judge Michael L. Brown.

Two other Georgia State Representatives were previously convicted of similar pandemic unemployment assistance fraud:

- Karen L. Bennett, former State Representative for District 94, pled guilty on January 21, 2026, to federal charges of making false statements to collect \$13,940 of pandemic unemployment benefits.
- Dexter L. Sharper, former State Representative for District 177, pled guilty on March 11, 2026, to federal charges of making false statements to collect \$13,825 of pandemic unemployment benefits.

This case is being investigated by the Georgia Office of the State Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, and Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Assistant United States Attorney Garrett L. Bradford is prosecuting the case.

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>.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6185. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.

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