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Kapolei Woman Sentenced to Two Years in Prison for Aggravated Identity Theft in Connection with Unemployment Insurance and Pandemic Unemployment Relief Program Fraud

HONOLULU – United States Attorney Ken Sorenson announced that Phoebe Trinh, also known as Phuong Trinh Ngoc Vo, 33, of Kapolei, Hawaii, was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Shanlyn A.S. Park to 24 months in prison followed by 6 months of supervised release for aggravated identity theft. Trinh was also ordered to forfeit $36,265 and pay $78,474 in restitution. Trinh pled guilty pursuant to a plea agreement in April 2026.

In 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act created the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) unemployment insurance program to provide emergency unemployment payments to certain workers whose livelihoods were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic but who were ineligible for traditional state unemployment insurance benefits, such as business owners, self-employed workers, independent contractors, and those with a limited work history who were out of business or had significantly reduced their services as a direct result of the pandemic. To obtain either traditional unemployment insurance (UI) or PUA UI benefit payments, claimants could submit a claim online. If approved, the U.S. Treasury typically deposited payments every week into a claimant's bank account. To continue to receive benefit payments, claimants were required to certify on a weekly basis under penalty of law that they remained unemployed or partially employed, and eligible to receive benefit payments.

According to court documents, Trinh admitted that between May 19, 2020 and October 20, 2020, she submitted a false claim online for UI benefit payments for herself, and then repeatedly falsely certified under penalty of law that she was unemployed and not receiving income, despite knowing that her certifications were false, in order to receive benefit payments that she was not entitled to receive.

Trinh then submitted a false claim for PUA UI benefit payments for another individual, who was an employee of her family's restaurant in Kapolei, Hawaii. Trinh used that individual's personal identifiable information, including his name and social security number, without that individual's knowledge and consent, in order to obtain additional benefit payments to which Trinh was not entitled. On May 19, 2020, and on multiple other occasions, Trinh then certified that the individual remained eligible for PUA UI benefit payments in order to receive his benefit payments, without the individual's knowledge and consent. Trinh then directed those benefit payments intended for the individual to be transferred to her own bank account.

According to court documents, Trinh fraudulently obtained at least $36,265 in unemployment insurance and PUA UI benefits to which she was not entitled.

"Motivated by greed, Trinh defrauded the government to obtain critical resources intended to provide a lifeline to unemployed Americans during the pandemic," said U.S. Attorney Ken Sorenson. "The National Fraud Enforcement Division is committed to investigating and prosecuting those who steal or fraudulently misuse taxpayer dollars, and our Office and law enforcement partners will work tirelessly to bring those individuals to justice."

"Phoebe Trinh's sentencing is a reminder that unemployment benefits were meant for workers in crisis—not criminals looking to exploit them. While Americans relied on these funds to survive, fraudsters drained them for personal gain," said Anthony P. D'Esposito, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor. "Working with Vice President Vance's White House Fraud Task Force and our state and local law enforcement partners, we will continue pursuing those who defraud American taxpayers. We will not tolerate anyone who undermines the public's trust."

The Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregg Paris Yates prosecuted the case.

On April 7, 2026, 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.

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