

Houston Woman Pleads Guilty to Covid Fraud Scheme

Friday, May 24, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Missouri

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – A Houston, Texas, woman has pleaded guilty in federal court to fraudulently receiving Missouri and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act unemployment benefits using the identity information of numerous other persons.

Prayshana Washington, 37, pleaded guilty before U.S. Chief District Judge Beth Phillips on Thursday, May 23, to one count of theft of government property.

By pleading guilty, Washington admitted she facilitated the filing of false claims in her name and the names of other persons, thereby fraudulently receiving unemployment benefits paid through the state of Missouri. These benefits included benefits from the CARES Act.

Washington filed claims for unemployment benefits, using the name and personal identifying information of individuals in the state of Missouri and elsewhere. These persons were not eligible to receive Missouri and enhanced unemployment benefits. The emergency increase in unemployment compensation benefits provided an additional \$600 weekly payment.

The total loss amount from May 2020 to June 2021 is at least \$550,000 but less than \$1.5 million. Under the terms of her plea agreement, Washington must pay restitution as determined by the court.

Under federal statutes, Washington is subject to a sentence of up to 10 years in federal prison without parole. The maximum statutory sentence is prescribed by Congress and is provided here for informational purposes, as the sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the court based on the advisory sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul S. Becker. It was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General and the Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General – Office of Investigations & Labor Racketeering Fraud.

Updated May 24, 2024