

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of Rhode Island

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, November 21, 2022

Coventry Woman Admits to Fraudulently Applying for and Receiving COVID Unemployment Benefits

PROVIDENCE – A Coventry woman today admitted to a federal judge that she fraudulently applied for and received more than \$17,000 in unemployment benefits provided for by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, announced United States Attorney Zachary A. Cunha and Rhode Island Attorney General Peter F. Neronha.

Deanna Alston, 34, admitted to the court that while collecting pandemic related unemployment benefits from the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, she filed fraudulent applications with the States of California and Pennsylvania, knowing that she was not entitled to collect benefits from those states. Between July 30, 2020, and September 8, 2020, Alston collected approximately \$17,075 in unemployment benefits that she was not entitled to receive.

Alston today pleaded guilty to a charge of wire fraud. She is scheduled to be sentenced on February 27, 2023. The defendant's sentences will be determined by a federal district judge after consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

This case, as well as other instances of criminal activity related to fraudulent applications for pandemic-related unemployment insurance benefits, are being investigated jointly by the FBI, Rhode Island State Police, and the U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General. Cases are jointly reviewed, charged, and prosecuted by a team of prosecutors that include Assistant U.S. Attorneys Stacey P. Veroni, Denise M. Barton, Stacey P. Veroni, and G. Michael Seaman, and Rhode Island Assistant Attorney General John M. Moreira, chief of the Rhode Island Attorney General's Public Integrity Unit.

Rhode Islanders who believe their personal identification has been stolen and used to fraudulently obtain unemployment benefits are urged to contact the Rhode Island State Police at financialcrimes@risp.gov or the FBI Providence office at (401) 272-8310.

On May 17, 2021, the United States 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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