

Baker: Unemployment insurance fraud has been “enormously difficult” to fight

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State House News Service

Combating the “thousands and thousands of attempts to steal money from the Unemployment Trust Fund” through fraudulent claims has been an “enormously difficult issue,” Gov. Charlie Baker said Thursday.

The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development in late May warned of a “national unemployment fraud scheme” involving the use of stolen personal information to file benefit claims, and said that payments may be delayed as unemployed workers are asked to provide additional identifying information.

“We’re not happy about the fact that we can’t just continue to make the funds available as quickly as we possibly can, but people are working really hard to make sure that people are in fact who they say they are,” Baker said Thursday. “And when you’re dealing with people who are as sophisticated as these people are that can often be complicated, and I wish that we didn’t have to deal with this, but we do.”

Baker said there have been specific cases where people “are calling a variety of places complaining about the fact that they didn’t get their check.” In some cases, he said, those complaints are legitimate, and in others “there’s somebody who’s working on behalf of the fraudsters to try to get funds released that we’ve already determined are, in fact, fraudulent to begin with.”

The state has been putting in mechanisms, recommended by

federal officials to double-check, and in some cases triple-check, filers' identities, Baker said. More than a million initial claims for regular unemployment insurance were filed in Massachusetts from March 15 to June 20, and 624,091 people have filed initial claims for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance since April 20, state labor officials reported Thursday.