

Massachusetts woman pleads guilty to identity theft and unemployment fraud related to COVID-19 pandemic

A Stoneham woman pleaded guilty today in connection with her involvement in a scheme to fraudulently obtain COVID-19-related unemployment assistance using stolen identities.

Lilly Nguyen, 24, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. U.S. District Court Judge Denise J. Casper scheduled sentencing for Dec. 1, 2021. In April 2021, Nguyen was previously charged in a criminal complaint with an alleged co-conspirator.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) created a temporary federal unemployment insurance program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. The program is administered by the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance and provides unemployment insurance benefits for individuals who are not eligible for other types of unemployment benefits (e.g., the self-employed, independent contractors, or gig economy workers).

Nguyen participated in a scheme to submit fraudulent Pandemic Unemployment Assistance claims using the stolen personally identifiable information of others. The investigation connected Nguyen and her alleged co-conspirator to more than \$250,000 in unemployment claims between April and December 2020.

The charge of conspiracy to commit wire fraud provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of aggravated identity theft provides for a mandatory sentence of

two years in prison to be served consecutively to any other sentenced imposed, one year of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell; Joseph R. Bonavolanta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; and Nikitas Splagounias, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations, Labor Racketeering and Fraud made the announcement. Special assistance was provided by the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance. Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Markham of Mendell's Securities, Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit is prosecuting the case.

On May 17, 2021, the 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>

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The details contained in the charging documents are allegations. The remaining defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.