



# Department of Justice

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Northern District of New York

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## **Seven Postal Employees Plead Guilty To Making False Statements To Obtain Unemployment Benefits**

*Defendants jeopardize integrity of program meant to assist hard working Americans*

Albany, New York--RICHARD S. HARTUNIAN, United States Attorney, Northern District of New York, announces that seven United States Postal Service employees have plead guilty to making false statements to obtain unemployment benefits to which they were not entitled. These guilty pleas are part of an ongoing national sweep targeting fraud by Postal workers in claiming unemployment benefits. In each case, the defendants lied about their eligibility for benefits by either falsely claiming to be unemployed or under-reporting their income, and fraudulently obtaining benefits ranging from \$5,396 to \$26,218.

All seven Postal employees entered guilty pleas to one count informations charging them with making false statements to obtain unemployment benefits they were not entitled to in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1919. At the guilty plea and sentencing each defendant was ordered to pay restitution in full for the fraud they committed. The defendants and the fraud amount in each case are as follows:

- Erin Gagnon, 37 of Plattsburgh, New York, \$26,218;
- Clarence Reed, 46 of Schenectady, New York, \$11,255;
- Nicole Martin, 41 of Brooklyn, New York, \$5,396;
- Donnel Richardson, 30 of Brooklyn, New York, \$9,007;
- Kelly Williams, 36 of Nyack, New York, \$16,605;
- Angela Blazejewski, 35 of Rocky Point, New York, \$11,542; and
- John Congiusti, 31 of Bronx, New York, \$8,896.

“We are always vigilant in enforcing the law, even when the case, sadly, involves public servants. The actions of these defendants undermine America’s trust in others serving the public and impede the system in benefitting those truly in need,” said United States Attorney Richard S. Hartunian. “Unemployment benefits are meant to provide crucial financial assistance to workers who become unemployed through no fault of their own. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to stop fraudulent schemes such as these which ultimately hurt the American taxpayers.”

“Today’s guilty pleas highlight the importance of this multi-agency investigation to identify fraud in benefit programs such as the U.S. Department of Labor’s Unemployment Insurance Program. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate those who seek to obtain benefits to which they are not entitled,” stated Robert Panella, Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations.

"These pleas come as a result of the excellent investigative collaboration between the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, the New York State Department of Labor-Office of Special Investigations and the Department of Labor Office of Inspector in General", said Rafael A. Medina, Special Agent in Charge of the USPSOIG's Northeast Area Field Office. "The Postal Service prides itself in its dedicated and professional employees, but the small percentage who stray away from those professional standards should know that law enforcement, at all levels, will always work closely to combat fraud against any federal or state program."

“Unemployment Insurance fraud - especially when it’s committed by government employees who should be serving taxpayers, not stealing from them – is something we at the Department of Labor have a zero tolerance policy on,” said State Labor Commissioner Peter M. Rivera. “Our Major Case Unit at the Labor Department continues to uncover these acts of deception on a daily basis and I am proud of the work we have done together with the U. S. Attorney for the Northern District of New York to bring these individuals to justice.”

This prosecution resulted from a joint investigation conducted by the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, New York State Department of Labor, Office of Special Investigations, and US Department of Labor OIG, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney, Geoffrey J. L. Brown.

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