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Eastern District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Jersey Man Indicted in Fraud Scheme to Steal California Unemployment Insurance Benefits

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A federal grand jury returned a 15-count indictment today against Eric Michael Jaklitsch, 40, of Elizabeth, New Jersey, charging him with wire fraud and aggravated identity theft, U.S. Attorney Phillip A. Talbert announced.

On Dec. 8, 2021, Jaklitsch was arrested on a federal criminal complaint at his home in New Jersey. He made his initial appearance in the District of New Jersey and was ordered detained for transport to the Eastern District of California.

According to court documents, between October 2020 and December 2021, Jaklitsch executed a scheme to defraud the California Employment Development Department (EDD) by filing at least 78 fraudulent unemployment insurance claims with EDD, seeking Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and other benefits under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. During the scheme, Jaklitsch collected personal identifying information of numerous individuals — including names, birth dates, and Social Security numbers — and used their identities to file fraudulent unemployment insurance claims. The filings represented, among other things, that the claimants had recently lost employment or were unable to find employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These unemployment insurance claims were fraudulent because, for example, the claimants were not unemployed, they were not eligible for California unemployment insurance benefits, or Jaklitsch did not have authority to file claims on their behalf.

Since at least October 2021, EDD has partnered with ID.me — a private company used by the EDD for ID verification of claimants — to implement a system for verifying claimant identities before EDD can process unemployment insurance claims. An internal investigation conducted by ID.me identified Jaklitsch as a person conducting a fraud scheme and referred the case to federal law enforcement. In executing his fraudulent scheme, Jaklitsch also submitted false information to ID.me that allowed his fake and stolen identities to be verified. This false information included images of fake driver's licenses that contained photos of Jaklitsch and the names of the purported claimants. He also submitted live photos of himself that were used to verify the photos on the fake driver's licenses. Once these false identities were verified, Jaklitsch filed the fraudulent unemployment insurance claims with EDD under the same identities. In executing his fraudulent scheme, Jaklitsch also submitted false information to ID.me that allowed his fake and stolen identities to be verified. This false information included images of fake driver's licenses that

contained photos of Jaklitsch and the names of the purported claimants. He also submitted live photos of himself that were used to verify the photos on the fake driver's licenses. Once these false identities were verified, Jaklitsch filed the fraudulent unemployment insurance claims with EDD under the same identities.

In the fraudulent unemployment insurance applications, Jaklitsch requested that the unemployment insurance benefits be mailed to various addresses under his control, including his residence in New Jersey. EDD approved dozens of the fraudulent claims and authorized Bank of America to mail out EDD debit cards containing unemployment insurance benefits. Jaklitsch then activated the EDD debit cards and used them to withdraw the benefits at ATMs throughout New Jersey. The scheme sought over \$2,500,000 in unemployment insurance benefits and caused EDD and the United States to incur actual losses exceeding \$900,000.

This case is the product of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Labor – Office of the Inspector General, the Department of Homeland Security – Office of the Inspector General – Covid Fraud Unit, and the California Employment Development Department (EDD) – Investigation Division. Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert J. Artuz is prosecuting the case.

If convicted, Jaklitsch faces a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each of the 14 wire fraud counts. He also faces a two-year mandatory prison sentence if convicted of aggravated identity theft, which must run consecutive to any sentence received on the wire fraud counts. Any sentence, however, would be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of any applicable statutory factors and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables. The charges are only allegations; the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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