

U.S. Secret Service Exposes Unemployment Benefits Scam by Overseas Fraud Ring

The latest memo from the U.S. Secret Service reveals that overseas criminals are registering for unemployment claims using stolen Social Security numbers and personally identifiable information (PII).

Unemployment benefit scams are not unique, but the Coronavirus pandemic has given fraudsters new ways of exploiting the surge in newly unemployed workers who file for benefits.

“A substantial amount of the fraudulent benefits submitted have used Personal Identifying Information (PII) from first responders, government personnel and school employees,” the Secret Service said.

More than 36 million Americans are currently jobless, and agencies are struggling to speed up the process of sending their benefits by any means possible, sometimes overlooking proper screening of applications.

According to investigators, the campaign is run by a well-organized Nigerian crime ring, with the sole purpose of defrauding the Federal Government of millions of dollars.

Using detailed information of identity theft victims, the attackers may also file claims on behalf of people who did not lose their jobs. For example, unemployment agencies from Washington State have received notifications and inquiries from working citizens who received unsolicited paperwork in the mail.

More than 400 employees at Western Washington University in Bellingham have also been targeted with similar fraudulent claims, according to university officials.

Investigators are now focusing on tracking down the individuals, and it appears that some people in the US are helping the scammers.

“We are actively running down every lead we are getting,” said special agent Roy Dotson in an interview. He also warned citizens to be suspicious of any quick-money job offerings and any questionable arrangements involving wiring transactions.

So far, Washington is the primary targeted state, however, “there is also evidence of attacks in North Carolina, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Oklahoma, Wyoming and Florida,” the Secret Service said.