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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Approved by: JAK**  
**Press Release #22-15**

**Re: Kern County DA files 9 Cases, Involving 17 Defendants, alleging EDD Fraud Totaling \$394,000**

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced the filing of nine felony cases encompassing seventeen different defendants for charges associated with Unemployment Insurance fraud. The combined loss to the State of California Employment Development Department (EDD) alleged over the cases is more than \$394,555. The defendants are variously charged with violations of Penal Code § 487, Grand Theft, Unemployment Insurance Code 2101(a), Penal Code § 182(a) Conspiracy and other theft related charges. Some defendants face up to three years in prison, others face a maximum of six years (6) in prison, and one faces up to 12 years in prison.

During the 2019-2020 Covid-19 pandemic, the EDD issued increased unemployment funds supplemented by the Federal Government to assist those left unemployed by pandemic restrictions. EDD reported as of January 2021 there was \$114 billion in total claims made during that period. It is estimated that of that amount, upwards of 20 billion dollars was fraudulently taken by people, gangs, or fraud rings, including inmates confined in state prisons or county jails.

In some cases, fraudulent unemployment applications were submitted online to EDD using stolen identities and in other cases inmates confined in prison or jails submitted claims directly or conspired to have others that were out of custody submit claims on their behalf. Once the fraudulent applications were approved by EDD, money was sent to a bank and an ATM card was sent to the listed address of the applicant. The thieves used the debit cards at ATMs to withdraw the cash loaded onto the debit cards.

Prior to this group of nine case filings, the Kern County District Attorney's Office has previously filed six EDD fraud cases totaling \$149,000 in losses. Investigations of additional EDD fraud is ongoing, and additional cases are expected to continue to be filed in the future.

EDD fraud cases are being prosecuted by the District Attorney's Prison Crimes section because many of

the cases involve prison inmates and were jointly investigated by the District Attorney's Bureau of Investigations and EDD fraud investigators. The cases have been submitted to the Superior Court for processing and the issuance of arrest warrants.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented on the filings, stating: "Investigators have been working to hold responsible those that defrauded Californians of billions of dollars in funding. These recent filings indicate the progress that continues to be made toward bringing to justice the participants in the greatest fraud in state history."

The recent cases filed are outlined below:

Defendant	Court Case Number	Charges	Alleged Amount of Loss
Paul Ayala Angela Acosta	DF016738A	UIC 2101(a) PC 487(a) PC 182/UIC 2101	\$22,766
Michael Clouse Luciano Franco	DF016739A DF016739B	UIC 2101(a) PC 487(a) PC 182/UIC 2101	\$28,200
Nicholas Peaker	BF189290A	UIC 2101(a) PC 487(a) PC 182/UIC 2101	\$20,111
Kessha Johnson	BF189293A	UIC 2101(a) PC 487(a)	\$29,100
Lonnie Harris Victoria Viera Bryan Gonzalez	DF016735 A DF016735 B DF016735 C	UIC 2101(a) PC 487(a) PC 182/UIC 2101	\$16,758
Antoya Cato Lawanda Rivers William Brown	BF189292A BF189292B BF189292C	UIC 2101(a) X 5 PC 487(a) X 5 PC 182/UIC 2101 X 2 PC 29800 PC 30305	\$97,885
Anthony Dabbs  (Also has drug + gun case no bail warrant outstanding BF182536)	BF189297A	UIC 2101(a) X 3 PC 487(a) X 3 PC 182/UIC 2101 X 3 PC 484E(b) PC 530.5 X 2	\$48,148
Loreno Trevino Destiny Ontiveros	DF016737A DF016737B	UIC 2101(a) PC 487(a) PC 182/UIC 2101	\$18,000
Hector Manzanares Stephanie Perez	DF016736A DF016736B	UIC 2101(a) PC 487(a) PC 182/UIC 2101	\$113,587
Total			\$394,555

Charge Descriptions:

PC § 487(a): Grand Theft of \$950 or more  
UIC § 2101(a): Unemployment Insurance Fraud: False Representation To Obtain or Increase Payment  
PC 182/UIC 2101: Conspiracy to Commit Unemployment Insurance Fraud  
PC29800: Prohibited person in possession of a firearm  
PC 30305: Prohibited person in possession of ammunition  
PC 484E(b): Possession of 4 or more fraudulently obtained access cards  
PC 530.5: Identity Theft