Maine DOL Takes Action to Prevent and Stop Fraud SHARE (http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&pub=mainelabor)

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AUGUSTA - The Maine Department of Labor today announced steps it is taking to investigate, prevent, and stop fraud perpetrated by criminals.

Maine, like many other states, is seeing an increase of intentionally fraudulent unemployment claims over the past two months amid the rise in overall unemployment insurance claims due to COVID-19. This practice, known as impostor fraud, occurs when a person's Personally Identifiable Information, or PII, is used illegally to apply for unemployment benefits.

Criminals use PII stolen from outside data breaches or other illicit means to create fraudulent unemployment claims, in hopes that the innocent people whose information has been compromised never know that a claim was filed using their identity. Unemployment fraud is not only a risk to the individuals whose identities were stolen, but also to employers who fund the payment of benefits through taxes.

The Department announced today that it is temporarily pausing benefits for 48 hours this week and reinstating its normal 10-14 day processing time for initial unemployment claims, which was expedited to seven days in response to unprecedented demands of COVID-19, to investigate and prevent fraud and further enhance security of the unemployment system.

"The Maine Department of Labor takes its responsibility to uphold the integrity of the unemployment program very seriously," Commissioner Laura Fortman said. MDOL will continue to work with our federal and state law enforcement partners to investigate and prevent fraud, while paying benefits to eligible Maine workers as quickly as possible.

These steps come as Maine, like other states, partners with the Federal government to combat fraudulent activity. The Maine Department of Labor is working with the U.S. Attorneys Office, Maine Attorney Generals Office, Maine State Police, Maine State Treasurer, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, U.S. Secret Service, Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcements Homeland Security Investigations and the FBI are working together to investigate and stop the

fraudulent unemployment claims. In Maine, the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General are spearheading the federal investigative effort.

In addition to the steps outlined above, Maine has joined a state-federal task force to detect and prevent fraud and is also:

- Coordinating with financial institutions to identify suspicious accounts;
- Reviewing system changes needed to increase fraud detection; and
- Blocking web addresses linked to fraud here in Maine and in other states.

If you believe that someone else has used your information to file a fraudulent unemployment application, please notify the Maine Department of Labor immediately at https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/idtheft/ (https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/idtheft/) .

Suspected fraud can also be reported to the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form (https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form) or (866) 720-5721.

If you think someone is using your personal information to open accounts, file taxes or make purchases, visit https://ww.identitytheft.gov (https://ww.identitytheft.gov) to report and recover from identity theft. Additional identity theft resources can be found at https://www.maine.gov/ag/privacy/identity_theft.shtml (https://www.maine.gov/ag/privacy/identity_theft.shtml) or https://www.ftc.gov/faq/consumer-protection/report-identity-theft/ (https://www.ftc.gov/faq/consumer-protection/report-identity-theft/) .

The Department of Justice put out a press release on unemployment fraud this morning: https://www.maine.gov/labor/news_events/article.shtml?id=2579879 (https://www.maine.gov/labor/news_events/article.shtml?id=2579879)

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