



RIVERSIDE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
**NEWS RELEASE**  
MIKE HESTRIN, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

WEBSITE: WWW.RIVCODA.ORG

TWITTER: @RIVCODA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
OCT. 21, 2022

CONTACT: AMY MCKENZIE  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS  
951.955.5834

**TWO MEN SENTENCED IN EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
SCHEME WITH LOSSES IN EXCESS OF \$500,000**

**RIVERSIDE** – Two defendants have been sentenced in an unemployment benefits fraud scheme, in which they pled guilty to submitting fraudulent California Employment Development Department (EDD) claims, resulting in a total loss of more than \$500,000.

Brandon Christopher Avery, DOB: 6-6-93, was sentenced to 10 years in prison as part of a plea agreement, wherein he admitted 13 felony counts. The court also ordered Avery to pay \$518,030 restitution to the EDD. Donald Marshawn Peer, DOB: 6-11-94, was sentenced to 8 years in prison as part of a plea agreement, wherein he admitted four felony counts and a strike prior offense. Both Avery and Peer also admitted special sentencing enhancements related to the excessive financial loss inflicted by their crimes.

While serving a prison sentence at Ironwood State Prison for a prior offense, Peer called Avery over recorded prison phone lines and provided him with the personal identifying information of several inmates and other individuals. Avery then used that information to file fraudulent unemployment claims. Avery and Peer agreed they would split the stolen benefits money with the inmates whose information they used to file the claims. On the recorded phone calls, Avery told Peer that he planned to buy designer goods and other items with the stolen money.

In addition to the inmate information provided by Peer, Avery also obtained personal identifying information for several other people, which he then used to file additional fraudulent claims with the EDD. The investigation also revealed that Avery offered to pay money to other individuals in exchange for use of their physical addresses to receive correspondence and prepaid benefits cards from the EDD.

The total amount of the EDD benefits paid out to the inmates and the other people was \$518,030.

The case, RIF2104179, was investigated by the DA's Bureau of Investigation, Major Fraud Unit, and prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Natasha Sorace of the DA's Financial Crimes Unit.

###