



# News Release

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November 20, 2020

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## **Former Postal Employee Sentenced for Identity Theft Scheme**

*Woman Defrauded Government Agencies of More Than \$267,000*

The Inspector General for the Social Security Administration, Gail S. Ennis, today announced that a former U.S. Postal Service employee was sentenced to 27 months in prison in the Western District of Washington, for her scheme to defraud government agencies of more than \$267,000. Ilignaoa Theresa Lauofo, age 40, of Tacoma, Washington, will also serve 3 years of supervised release. The sentence is the result of her previous guilty plea to charges of wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, and embezzlement.

According to the grand jury indictment, Lauofo defrauded State and Federal agencies and financial institutions in a scheme from 2011 to 2018. First, she misrepresented her household composition, marital status, and income to apply for federally funded benefits, and repeatedly concealed information to continue receiving those benefits. Lauofo then misused the personal information, including Social Security numbers, of minor children residing in American Samoa or Western Samoa, reporting they resided with her so she could collect benefits on their behalf. She also filed claims for similar benefits using the personal information of three relatives living in California and American Samoa, without their authorization.

The indictment further states that Lauofo used the stolen identities to establish fraudulent credit and bank accounts, then cashed worthless checks to cause a fraud loss of approximately \$10,000. While employed briefly by the U.S. Postal Service, Lauofo also stole checks from the mail and deposited them into these fraudulent accounts. In addition to the prison sentence, the Court ordered Lauofo to pay restitution totaling \$276,639.

"Ms. Lauofo used stolen identities to fraudulently receive federally funded benefits for several years, and she abused her position as a Federal employee for personal gain," said Gail S. Ennis, Inspector General for the Social Security Administration. "My office will continue to hold those in positions of public trust to a higher standard of accountability, working closely with the U.S. Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners."

This case was jointly investigated by the Social Security Office of the Inspector General, Seattle Field Division, under the supervision of Special Agent in Charge Steuart Markley; Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Office of Fraud and Accountability; and the United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General. Assistant United States Attorney Benjamin Diggs prosecuted the case.

Inspector General Ennis thanked the United States Attorney's Office and our investigative partners for their efforts in bringing this individual to justice and helping recover valuable taxpayer funds.

Members of the public are encouraged to report suspected Social Security fraud to the OIG at <https://oig.ssa.gov/>.