

PRESS RELEASE

Former Missouri State Worker Admits Stealing \$140,000 in Unemployment Insurance Funds

Monday, March 20, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Missouri

ST. LOUIS – A former Missouri state employee on Monday admitted abusing her position to send \$140,500 in unearned unemployment benefits to friends, relatives and others.

Vicky Hefner, 63, of Jefferson County, Missouri, was working for the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, Division of Employment Security as a benefit program specialist at the time of the crimes, which occurred from July to December of 2020. As part of her guilty plea to one count of theft of public money, Hefner admitted logging into the accounts of approximately eight friends, relatives and associates to either make them eligible for unemployment benefits when they were not otherwise eligible or increase their benefits. She also backdated some claims to increase benefits and changed the status of some who were receiving pandemic-related unemployment assistance to regular unemployment assistance to fraudulently increase the benefits they received, the plea says.

Hefner had worked at the agency since 2009.

At her sentencing, scheduled for June 22, Hefner could face up to 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. She will also be ordered to repay the money.

The case was investigated by the Office of Inspector General at both the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Labor. Assistant U.S. Attorney Edward Dowd III is prosecuting the case.

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