

IDES FRAUD SCHEME: Some victims fear they could be financially responsible for fake claims issued in their names

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IDES fraud: Are you on the hook?

CHICAGO (WLS) -- Victims of Illinois Department of Employment Security fraud have told the ABC7 I-Team they are now concerned they could be financially responsible for fake claims issued in their names.

The victims of the nationwide unemployment scam never applied for benefits, but they

Now, some of those victims tell the I-Team they're worried they will be on the hook for those fraudulent claims.

"I did not request unemployment, I'm retired, I have no idea what this is." Lemont resident, Kathy Komenda, told the I-Team.

She was shocked to receive a letter from the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), with a bank debit card for unemployment benefits.

When Komenda called KeyBank to cancel the card, they told her there was \$12,168 on the card. Now, she is wondering if she will be on the hook to pay back that \$12,000, or be taxed for it.

Earlier this month, Governor JB Pritzker said that won't happen, "Individuals who have self-reported, and have been properly flagged that they've been a victim of fraud won't have a 1099 form sent to the IRS on their behalf."

The FBI told the I-Team there is a risk of victims getting a tax form showing that they received the money.

Komenda, like dozens of victims of unemployment fraud who have contacted the I-Team, said she cannot get thru to IDES, on the phone to report the fraud.

"I could not get through to the unemployment office, I tried and tried so many times and I was just so frustrated," she said.

Pritzker said at least 120,000 "fraudulent claims" have occurred in Illinois after a national fraud outbreak in the unemployment system.

The I-Team first exposed the unemployment scam in June.

Vicki Montgomery of Calumet City, received a debit card and a letter from IDES that said she was getting benefits but she never applied.

The I-Team alerted IDES but a month and a half later Montgomery said she has no resolution.

"I need something in writing to say I am not liable for this particular amount of money," she said.

While IDES can't comment on specific incidents, they told the I-Team that their "...unemployment system automatically sends out letters when it detects an overpayment... The Department does the best it can to prevent these letters from going out when fraud has been reported, but ..these letters can sometimes make their way out the door unintentionally. ...it's important for them to know that they will not be responsible for the repayment of fraudulent funds received in their name."

Many have told the I-Team that the process of reporting fraud to IDES is confusing.

The state recommends these steps: first, call the Benefit Payment Control Division (800) 814-0513) and when prompted, select the language option of Spanish or English.

Then, select option #1 for "claimants", and select option #5 to report identity theft.

Due to their high volume of calls about fraud, you'll likely have to leave a message to be called back.

Remember, do not activate the debit card mailed to you.

You can also report the fraud to IDES on its website's fraud link online.

In addition you should report fraud to the FBI, your local police and the Illinois Attorney General's office.

In order to get your fraud case on the record with authorities, the FBI says call 1-800-CALL-FBI. Or log onto its website.