

Got Pa. unemployment cash you weren't supposed to? Your identity may have been stolen.

by [Erin Arvedlund](#), The Inquirer, Updated: June 10, 2020

Mitch Gerstein didn't file for unemployment — he remains an extremely busy and employed accountant. So he was surprised to receive two checks totaling nearly \$12,000 in unemployment benefits from the state of Pennsylvania.

"Someone obviously filed in my name," said Gerstein, who works for Isdaner & Co., a tax accounting firm based in Bala Cynwyd.

Without receiving those checks in the mail, he never would have known that he and [as many as 58,000 other Pennsylvanians](#) had some identifying information stolen as part of nationwide scams related to coronavirus. [Readers can report identity thefts related to unemployment here.](#) In this version of the fraud, thieves steal identities of working people and then file claims for Pennsylvania unemployment. Sometimes the fraudsters direct the money to go to their own bank accounts rather than the person whose identity was stolen.

Since discovering the crime, Pennsylvania's Department of Labor and Industry is starting to route unemployment checks to the home addresses or bank accounts of working people named in the suspicious applications — in order to prevent the thieves from getting the money.

"We're also starting to issue debit cards" in place of paper checks, said Susan Dickinson, the department's unemployment compensation benefits policy director.

As a result, victims of identity theft such as Gerstein may learn that their personal identifying information was stolen only when they receive a Pennsylvania unemployment compensation check, or a direct deposit of unemployment benefits, for which they never applied. Gerstein received two checks -- for \$4,800 and \$6,864 -- totaling \$11,664, which he is returning. If you believe you are a victim of this type of fraud or identity theft, state Attorney General Josh Shapiro and U.S. Attorney William McSwain provided the following guidance:

- If you receive a paper check for unemployment benefits in the mail but did not file in Pennsylvania, do not cash the check.
- Likewise, if you receive a direct deposit but did not seek benefits in Pennsylvania, do not use the money. The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry website contains detailed instructions for returning the funds.
- File a police report with your local law enforcement, and don't take "no need" for an answer. The Department of Labor and Industry wants a copy of that police report, and so will federal authorities.
- In addition, report suspected identity theft to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry and the Federal Trade Commission. A complaint form is available on the Department's website: DLI.Pa.gov. Identity theft and fraud can also be reported to the department using its fraud hotline, 1-800-692-7469. The FTC also has an entire website devoted to identity theft: IdentityTheft.gov.

For more information, go to: <https://www.inquirer.com/news/pennsylvania-unemployment-scam-fraud-identity-theft-coronavirus-ftc-20200610.html>