

Attorney General Raoul Charges Woman For Stealing Nearly \$250,000 Through Unclaimed Property Program

by Submitted by Attorney General Raoul's Office
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CHICAGO – Attorney General Kwame Raoul today charged a suburban Cook County woman who allegedly stole nearly \$250,000 in unclaimed property from four victims by filing fraudulent claims with Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs' Unclaimed Property Division. The charges also allege the defendant took out a \$20,275 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan in the name of one of her victims.



Maria Michaud, 37, of Berwyn, Illinois, was arraigned today in Lake County Circuit Court. According to Raoul, Michaud filed four fraudulent claims with the Illinois

Treasurer's office for \$247,760.29 worth of unclaimed property in other individuals' names. Michaud is alleged to have changed several of her victims' addresses with the U. S. Postal Service and opened numerous bank accounts in the names of her victims.

"Illinois' Unclaimed Property Program successfully reunites lost funds and property with the rightful owners. Anyone who fraudulently claims property through the program is not only defrauding the state of Illinois. They are stealing from real people who have a right to that property and who may need the financial relief that money or property would bring," Raoul said. "I will continue to collaborate with Treasurer Frerichs and federal law enforcement agencies to investigate and hold individuals accountable for taking advantage of this program."

The investigation was opened after the Illinois Treasurer's Unclaimed Property Division flagged the paid claims as potentially being fraudulent.

"We take very seriously our responsibility to safeguard unclaimed property and these criminal charges are evidence that our increased theft-prevention efforts are working," Frerichs said. "I deeply appreciate the cooperation and professionalism of Attorney General Raoul and the FBI to bring this case to justice and the General Assembly for providing us the financial resources to upgrade our fraud prevention systems."

The unclaimed property victims in this case did not lose their money, Frerichs said.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the United States Postal Inspection Service assisted in the investigation.

"With many Americans struggling to afford necessities, every penny counts," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Robert W. "Wes" Wheeler, Jr. "We are committed to working with our law enforcement and prosecutorial partners to ensure that these important financial resources go to their rightful owners."

Raoul's office charged Michaud with the following:

- Two counts of money laundering, Class 1 felonies each punishable by up to 15 years in prison.
- Three counts of aggravated identity theft, Class 1 felonies each punishable by up to 15 years in prison.
- Two counts of identity theft, one a Class X felony punishable by up to 30 years in prison and the other a Class 1 felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

- Two counts of theft of government property, one a Class X felony punishable by up to 30 years in prison and the other a Class 1 felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison.
- One count of continuing a financial crimes enterprise, a Class 1 felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison.
- Four counts of forgery, Class 3 felonies punishable by up to five years in prison.
- One count of theft, a Class 2 felony punishable by up to seven years in prison.

Since two of Michaud's alleged victims are over 60 years of age, an extended prison sentence could be imposed by the judge. Michaud pleaded not guilty, and her next court date is scheduled for June 4.

The public is reminded that the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Assistant Attorney General Amy H. Flynn is prosecuting the case for Raoul's Special Prosecutions Bureau.