



News Release

Pat Quinn, Governor

Jay Rowell, Director

For Immediate Release
October 10, 2012

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Integrity Program Uncovers Nearly \$2 Million in Fraud *Inmates Face Criminal Charges, Barred from Future Benefits*

CHICAGO – More than 1,100 individuals could face criminal charges and must repay nearly \$2 million in unemployment insurance benefits wrongfully paid on their behalf while they were in jail or prison, the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) announced today.

Cross-matching names of individuals collecting unemployment insurance benefits with inmate lists from Illinois' county jails and state prisons is the latest effort to protect taxpayers, prevent fraud, and help the economy, IDES Director Jay Rowell said. Integrity initiatives in the past year have saved \$120 million.

“The inmate cross-matching initiative is another important step in rooting out waste, fraud and abuse,” Rowell said. “Money that funds the unemployment insurance program comes from businesses. Stopping fraud helps our businesses reduce costs, which leads to new hires and a stronger economy.”

Data released today represents July, August and September, the integrity program's first quarter. Previous months also were examined. The IDES will seek repayment and garnish federal and state tax returns if necessary. The IDES will prohibit individuals from collecting future unemployment insurance benefits as long as the debt is outstanding. The IDES also will recommend appropriate cases for prosecution.

To be eligible for unemployment insurance, an individual must be available for work. The new inmate cross-matching system identified individuals who were incarcerated and receiving benefits. Measures are in place to prevent benefits from being improperly stripped from someone who was incarcerated but otherwise available for work. It is possible that the incarcerated individual did not know someone continued to certify for benefits on their behalf. All IDES decisions can be appealed.

While the new system stopped some payments before they could be made, the largest single wrongfully collected amount was nearly \$43,000 on behalf of one individual in the Cook County Jail. There were 296 Cook County inmates connected to \$722,689 in wrongful payments. Other leaders: Will County, 21 inmates and \$85,159; Winnebago, 20 inmates and \$84,533, Lake, 20 and \$76,017 and Peoria, 21 and \$72,350. It is unlikely that jail officials and local leaders could have prevented the wrongful payments.

In the past year since Rowell has been appointed by Gov. Quinn, he has initiated the inmate cross-matching system; started garnishing federal tax returns of unemployment cheats, bolstered the anti-fraud unit with attorneys from Attorney General Lisa Madigan; and created a new-hire directory to more quickly identify fraud. The programs have saved taxpayers \$120 million.

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