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New CAO Initiative Fights Unemployment Fraud

Are you or someone you know unemployed? Everyone is aware of the tough economic times, and no one feels the effects more than those who are unemployed. With the unemployment rate in St. Louis hovering around 7.5%, many people have found themselves searching for a new position. Unemployment can take a devastating toll mentally, emotionally and financially.

Unemployment fraud hurts not only those who need it to stay afloat, but also the thousands of taxpayers who fund the system. We're proud to announce that we've launched a new initiative that will help protect taxpayers and ensure that those who abuse unemployment are held accountable.

Working in conjunction with the Missouri Department of Labor, we will work to investigate and prosecute instances of unemployment fraud. Circuit Attorney Jennifer Joyce has appointed Virginia Lay to serve as a Special Prosecutor in our White Collar Fraud Unit to head up prosecutions. Although the initiative has only been in effect a little over 2 months, Lay has already prosecuted over \$48,000 in unemployment fraud.

Unemployment benefits were originally designed to help people who lost their job make ends meet while they searched for a new job. Unfortunately, there are unscrupulous individuals who defraud the system and take money from those who genuinely need it. The cost of unemployment fraud affects not only those who genuinely need it, but every tax paying citizen and business in our region.

This new initiative will help protect taxpayers and the sustainability of the unemployment system. "We're very excited about the opportunity to protect tax dollars on a major scale," Jennifer Joyce explains. "Virginia's skills and background will enable her to make a tremendous impact on our ability to address this area of fraud."

Virginia Lay has extensive experience in employment law and prosecution. She previously worked for the Jackson County Prosecutors Office, the St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office, and as a Special Prosecutor with the Missouri Attorney General's Office. She has participated in over 75 jury trials, including federal employment cases. Lay is a graduate of Columbia University and Washington University School of Law. In addition to serving as a Special Prosecutor with our office, she maintains her position as head of the Government Solutions Unit at Hesse Martone.