Southern Oregon Woman Sentenced for Using Deceased Husband's Identity to Obtain Federal Student Aid Funds

MEDFORD, Ore.—A Southern Oregon woman was sentenced in federal court Monday for using her deceased husband's identity to unlawfully obtain more than $36,000 in federal student aid.

Cynthia Pickering, 56, of Central Point, Oregon, was sentenced to 36 months' probation and ordered to pay $36,341 in restitution to the U.S. Department of Education.

According to court documents, beginning in September 2017 and continuing through April 2019, Pickering devised a scheme to use her deceased husband's personally identifiable information to submit multiple applications for federal student aid and enroll her former husband at three different colleges and universities in Oregon. These fraudulent applications caused the three colleges and universities—Eastern Oregon University, Rogue Community College, and Western Oregon University—to disperse $36,341 in federal student aid into Pickering's personal checking account.

To conceal her scheme, Pickering attended online classes pretending to be her former husband so that her husband would remain eligible for the student aid. Pickering did what was necessary to pass first term courses at each institution and collect the funds.

On October 6, 2022, a federal grand jury in Medford returned a nine-count indictment charging Pickering with wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, and student loan fraud, and, on November 15, 2022, she was arrested at her residence in Central Point. On August 21, 2023, Pickering pleaded guilty to three counts of wire fraud and three counts of student aid fraud.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Inspector General (ED-OIG). It was prosecuted by John C. Brassell, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon.

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