



County of Rockland

Office of the County Executive

Office of the District Attorney

NEWS RELEASE

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DISTRICT ATTORNEY, COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES TARGET LOCAL RESIDENTS IN NEXT PHASE OF WELFARE FRAUD EFFORT

New City, NY - Rockland County District Attorney Thomas P. Zugibe, County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef and Department of Social Services Commissioner Susan Sherwood today announced the results of a major crackdown targeting local residents accused of stealing approximately \$581,000 in public assistance benefits from county taxpayers.

The welfare fraud charges are part of a continued effort to aggressively expose and prosecute local residents who steal benefits from the County of Rockland.

The recipients fraudulently obtained Medicaid, food stamps, daycare assistance and other types of public assistance benefits offered by the Rockland County Department of Social Services.

District Attorney Zugibe said, "These defendants, who used deceit and fraud to feign a need for public support, will be held accountable for ripping off the system for thousands of dollars,"

Throughout this extensive investigation dubbed "Operation Fraudbuster," the Special Investigations Unit of the Rockland County District Attorney's Office and the County of Rockland Department of Social Services Special Investigations Unit worked in conjunction with the Office of the Rockland County Executive and the Ramapo Police Department.

In the initial phase of the investigation, forty-three members of twenty-five households were charged with stealing benefits. Most of those found to have stolen money during the initial phase of the investigation have agreed to, and have begun to pay back the money to the County of Rockland. The amount of money being repaid is over \$121,000.

The individuals from households who have not agreed to pay back the funds are now facing criminal and civil proceedings. The District Attorney's Office is preparing some of these cases for criminal trials. The first trial is scheduled to begin on December 14, 2009. The Department of Social Services is pursuing the other cases civilly. The amount of funds stolen in these categories is over \$239,000.

The second phase of the investigation included an Amnesty Program. This program was designed to communicate with Rockland County benefit recipients that illegal conduct and intentionally reporting false facts on their applications would no longer be tolerated and that offenders would be held criminally responsible. A community outreach effort included informative talks and the dissemination of informational posters by the Department of Social Services. Four households voluntarily admitted they took over \$18,000. This money is being repaid.

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The beginning of the final phase of the operation, which commenced at the conclusion of the Amnesty Program, and will continue indefinitely as a permanent program, has already uncovered fifteen additional households which had been stealing benefits they were not entitled. The total amount of theft exposed thus far in this phase exceeds \$202,000. The investigations into these newer thefts are continuing. To date, eight arrests have already been made. Additionally, another two individuals have already been indicted.

"Time has run out for these welfare cheats. They were each given the chance to come forward to admit their wrongdoing. Now, the full resources of the District Attorney's office will be brought to bear on these criminals, making it much harder on them" said District Attorney Zugibe.

Welfare fraud most commonly consists of public assistance recipients failing to report income, failing to report that an absent parent is no longer absent, or failing to report that aided children no longer live in the aided household. Through this fraud, welfare recipients receive cash aid and/or food stamps for which they are not entitled to.

Those who commit fraudulent welfare acts not only shortchange the county, but also rip off honest members of the community who truly need public help.

"I thank our D.A. and Commissioner Sherwood for their continued efforts to root out and prosecute welfare fraud. It's not just a crime against the County, but its stealing from all law-abiding taxpayers in Rockland," Vanderhoef said. "Scofflaws won't be tolerated. These individuals will be subject to the full penalties of the law."

"Each and every day, residents needing assistance for themselves and their families contact us. It is our legal responsibility to make sure that those who need assistance, and qualify for our programs, receive appropriate services," Sherwood said. "People who receive benefits illegally take time, effort and resources that should be used for the growing number of truly needy individuals and families in our County."

"This new phase of our welfare fraud prosecution effort shows that we are keeping a promise made to our taxpayers. The District Attorney's office is committed to combating fraud and protecting the County's welfare fund. Criminals who live well while receiving public assistance benefits will have their assets seized and face the full prosecutorial powers of my office," said Zugibe.

Whether enforcement action is criminal or civil, the primary goals of litigation are restitution to the taxpayers for the fraudulently obtained services and deterrence.

The Rockland County District Attorney's office is committed to fighting welfare fraud and other crimes involving public funds. Rockland is one of more than a dozen counties participating in a state-sponsored program designed to fight crimes against public revenues -- CARP (Crimes Against Revenue Program). Under this unique grant program, Rockland County currently receives approximately \$72,000 to fund investigations and prosecutions of individuals and businesses that defraud the state and local governments.

Welfare fraud is a serious crime that threatens millions of public dollars. It is committed by individuals fraudulently receiving benefits and by public employees stealing from within the system. In both cases, these criminals who cheat the welfare system cheat more than a government agency. They cheat society of much needed resources and taxpayers of their hard-earned money.

PHASE 3

NAME	TOWN	AGE	SEX	AMOUNT
Abigail Bridgewater	233 Kennedy Dr. Apt. 9 Spring Valley	25	Female	\$6,756.09
Carolyn Casazza	53 Beach Road Stony Point	42	Female	\$3,162.10
Lauren Frankovitz	2 Second Avenue, Apt. C Nanuet	35	Female	\$9,990.96
Johnson Loh	29 Bonnie Court Spring Valley	64	Male	\$54,494.79
Geidy Perez	508 Nyack Plaza Nyack	30	Female	\$9,761.49
Alexia Roberts	70 West Street Spring Valley	38	Female	\$39,477.71
Nathan Misky	73 W. Maple Ave Monsey	53	Male	\$49,000.00
Mindy Misky	73 W. Maple Ave Monsey	50	Female	\$49,000.00

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