



CYRUS R. VANCE, JR.  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

DISTRICT ATTORNEY – NEW YORK COUNTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 22, 2016

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**DA VANCE: HRA EMPLOYEE INDICTED FOR STEALING FROM ELDERLY,  
INFIRM CLIENTS**

*Eligibility Specialist Used Access to Clients' Information to Change EBT Cardholders' PINs and Steal Their Benefits*

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., today announced the indictment of ROBERT TEJADA, 32, for using his position as an Eligibility Specialist at the New York City Human Resources Administration's ("HRA") Senior Works Center in Manhattan to steal the personal identifying information of approximately 137 Electronic Benefits Transaction ("EBT") cardholders, and defraud them of approximately \$36,000 in benefits. The defendant is charged in a 277-count New York State Supreme Court indictment with Criminal Possession of Public Benefit Cards in the First Degree, Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, Identity Theft in the First, Second, and Third Degrees, and Welfare Fraud in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Degrees, among other charges.<sup>1</sup>

The indictment is the culmination of an investigation by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office's Public Corruption Unit, HRA's Economic Crimes Unit, and the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI").

"In this case, a public employee entrusted with sensitive information is accused of abusing his power in order to defraud elderly, vulnerable victims – many of them immigrants who did not speak English," said District Attorney Vance. "Over the course of two years, the defendant is charged with locking more than 137 victims – many of them his own clients, whom he interviewed face-to-face – out of their own EBT accounts, changing their PINs, and then stealing thousands of dollars of benefits that should have gone toward groceries and other essentials."

HRA Commissioner Steven Banks said: "This employee violated the public trust by stealing benefits from the most vulnerable New Yorkers. We will not tolerate this appalling behavior and will

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<sup>1</sup>The charges contained in the indictment is merely an allegation, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. All factual recitations are derived from documents filed in court and statements made on the record in court.

proceed with swift disciplinary action. HRA is working internally and with the Department of Investigations to prevent, detect, and report known or suspected fraud and abuse or other forms of misconduct that amount to theft of benefits and assistance from New Yorkers who need our help.”

DOI Commissioner Mark G. Peters said: “This defendant leveraged his position as an Eligibility Specialist with access to personal information and stole benefits from New York’s most vulnerable to enrich himself. These shameless actions must be dealt with swiftly to stem further large-scale public assistance schemes, like the theft of millions of dollars in public funds that DOI and its partners uncovered last year. I thank the Manhattan District Attorney and HRA for their work on this important case.”

According to court documents and statements made on the record in court, from November 2013 through November 2015, TEJADA used his position at the HRA Senior Works Center near Union Square to access the personal identifying information of at least 137 EBT cardholders. As an Eligibility Analyst, TEJADA conducted in-person interviews in order to determine whether applicants were eligible for financial assistance. Applicants provided the defendant with various documents when applying, including birth certificates, Social Security cards, and New York State Identification cards, as well as copies of leases or utility bills and other documents used to demonstrate proof of residence.

TEJADA is charged with changing approximately 137 EBT cardholders’ personal identification numbers (“PINs”) by calling the EBT automated phone line and entering his clients’ full card numbers, the last four digits of their Social Security numbers, and zip codes. By doing so, TEJADA locked the cardholders out of their accounts, and then used the card numbers and new PINs at nearby bodegas to systematically defraud the cardholders of approximately \$36,000 over the course of more than 400 transactions.

TEJADA primarily targeted elderly victims, many of whom were his own clients. The average age of TEJADA’s victims was 71-years-old; the oldest victim was 99-years-old. Many of his victims suffered from mental and physical illnesses, and only discovered the theft when a family member attempted to use their cards to purchase groceries and other essentials on their behalf. TEJADA also appears to have targeted non-English speakers, and stole approximately \$11,000 from victims who only spoke languages such as Korean, Bengali, Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian, Polish, Urdu, Albanian, Spanish, Arabic and Fujianese. Additionally, two of TEJADA’s victims were recently deceased.

Over the course of this two-year-long fraud, TEJADA’s thefts included approximately:

- \$1,050 from a 62-year-old Jamaican immigrant from recovering from hip replacement surgery in a nursing home in the Bronx;
- \$650 from a 65-year-old Chinese immigrant who spent 3 months saving her benefits, only to discover that her account balance was \$0 when she attempted to purchase milk;
- \$3,375 from an 83-year-old Russian man who does not speak English and suffers from dementia;
- \$1,600 from an 80-year-old woman who is bed-ridden after suffering from a brain aneurism;
- \$300 from an 84-year-old woman who only speaks Mandarin, and whose daughter discovered the theft when attempting to purchase groceries for her mother; and

- \$140 from a 79-year-old bed-ridden woman who only speaks Haitian, and whose son discovered the theft when attempting to purchase groceries for his mother.

Assistant District Attorney Kaegan Marie Mays-Williams is handling the prosecution of the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Charles Linehan, Deputy Chief of the Public Corruption Unit, and Luke Rettler, Chief of the Public Corruption Unit, as well as Executive Assistant District Attorney David Szuchman, Chief of the Investigation Division. Senior Rackets Investigator Edward Johnson assisted with the investigation, as did Investigator Christo Christonikos and Supervising Rackets Investigator Alexander Farrugia, under the supervision of Assistant Chief Rackets Investigator Michael J. Wigdor, and Chief Investigator Walter Alexander. Investigative Analyst Samuel Burns assisted with the case, as did Investigative Analyst Benjamin Cabranes.

District Attorney Vance thanked the members of HRA's Economic Crimes Unit, including Investigators Alson Goddard, Tiffany Kan, Althea McDonald, and Keisha Outlaw, and Senior Investigator Marisol Leon, for their assistance. District Attorney Vance also thanked DOI for its assistance, especially Assistant Inspector General Christos Hilas and Inspector General Milton Yu.

#### Defendant Information:

ROBERT TEJADA, D.O.B. 12/1/1983  
New York, NY

#### Charges:

- Criminal Possession of Public Benefit Cards in the First Degree, a class C felony, 1 count
- Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a class D felony, 1 count
- Identity Theft in the First Degree, a class D felony, 1 count
- Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, a class D felony, 1 count
- Welfare Fraud in the Fourth Degree, a class E felony, 5 counts
- Identity Theft in the Second Degree, a class E felony, 13 counts
- Defrauding the Government, a class E felony, 1 count
- Welfare Fraud in the Fifth Degree, a class A misdemeanor, 123 counts
- Identity Theft in the Third Degree, a class A misdemeanor, 123 counts
- Unlawful Possession of Personal Identification Information in the Third Degree, a class A misdemeanor, 8 counts

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