



Department of Investigation *Press Releases*

DOI Arrests NYCHA Employee In Manhattan Apartment Payoff Scam

Release 008-2000

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2000 — EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of JOSEPH HARRIS, a Housing Assistant at the New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) Wise Towers development in Manhattan, for unlawfully accepting \$2,000 in cash from a tenant seeking to rent an apartment and then falsifying NYCHA documents to conceal the illegal tenancy.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, DOI initiated an investigation after the unauthorized tenant complained to NYCHA's Public Information Office that she had been a NYCHA tenant for over four years and that HARRIS, the so-called "manager" of the Wise Towers development, had never completed the paperwork to give her a lease in her own name. The tenant further disclosed that she had paid HARRIS \$2,000 for the apartment.

DOI's investigation revealed that HARRIS was actually Wise Towers Housing Assistant and was responsible for supervising leasing and rent collection for the development's apartments. Sometime before 1995, an apartment in the development became available when the tenant of record, a retired City employee, moved to Colorado. Rather than reporting the vacancy as required, HARRIS, in effect, assumed control of the apartment by falsely indicating that the tenant of record was still living there. HARRIS then allegedly "sold" the apartment without NYCHA's knowledge to the complaining tenant for \$2,000. Thereafter, HARRIS altered NYCHA records to make it appear that the former tenant of record was still living in the apartment.

HARRIS, 49, of 192 Crown Street in Brooklyn, has been employed by NYCHA since 1974 and earns \$39,408 annually. HARRIS is charged with Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, Tampering with Public Records in the First Degree, Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, Receiving Reward for Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, and Official Misconduct. If convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

The investigation was conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner and Inspector General for NYCHA Steven A. Pasichow and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspector General Kevin Smith and Confidential Investigators Bergia Telesford and Alexandra Guth.

The Office of New York County District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney David Shapiro of the Welfare Fraud Unit is handling the matter.