



## Department of Investigation *Press Releases*

### *Welfare Recipient Charged In \$10,000 Check Scam*

#### **Release #014-2000**

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2000 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of a former welfare recipient, KEITH SYKES, for stealing, altering, and negotiating 15 public assistance checks, totaling over \$10,300, including emergency rent and homeless client food checks.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, DOI initiated an investigation last September when the City Human Resources Administration's (HRA) Division of Automated Check Inventory and Tracking Unit (DACIT) reported that public assistance benefits checks, issued by HRA to various clients, had allegedly been intercepted, altered, and negotiated by SYKES.

The investigation revealed that, between June 4 and December 23, 1999, SYKES, a public assistance recipient up to October 12, 1999, fraudulently obtained, altered, and negotiated 15 emergency checks, totaling \$10,310.50, which had been issued in the names of various clients by HRA's Waverly Job Center in Manhattan. Commissioner Kuriansky noted that emergency checks are routinely issued by job centers to cover clients' critical needs.

Fourteen (14) of the intercepted emergency checks, each in the amount of \$29.30, had been made payable to individual homeless public assistance clients to cover their purchase of food. SYKES allegedly misappropriated the checks, changed the payees' names to his own, altered the check amounts to figures ranging from \$600.50 to \$750.50, and cashed all 14. The 15th check, dated June 4, 1999, in the amount of \$107.50, was an emergency check issued on behalf of SYKES, payable to his landlord. SYKES also intercepted this check, changed the payee name to his own, altered the amount to \$721.50, and cashed the check. SYKES negotiated all 15 checks at various check cashing establishments in Manhattan and Brooklyn, using his public assistance photo identification card.

SYKES, 34, of Brooklyn, New York, is currently incarcerated at the Rikers Island Correctional Facility on a prior parole violation. He has been charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree and 6 counts of Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree. If convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

. The investigation was conducted by Gerard Hoey, DOI's Inspector General for HRA, and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspector General Benjamin Defibaugh and Confidential Investigator Nanci Chalkin. Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his appreciation to HRA's DACIT Unit for its assistance and cooperation in the investigation.

WELFARE RECIPIENT CHARGED IN \$10,000 CHECK SCAM

The Office of Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney Christina Berninger has been assigned to handle the matter.