



Department of Investigation

Press Releases

Manhattan District Attorney

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2000 -- Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau announced today the indictment of a former New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) employee and two others for stealing over \$112,000 in public assistance benefits. The indictment resulted from an investigation conducted by the New York City Department of Investigation.

The indictment charges MARY SANTOS, former HRA employee, with Grand Larceny in the Second Degree, nine counts of Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, and two counts of Grand Larceny in the Third Degree. CHARLES TORRES is charged with nine counts of Grand Larceny in Third Degree and two counts of Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree. DORIS WALKER TORRES is charged with three counts of Grand Larceny in the Third Degree.

From 1992 to 1996, SANTOS worked at three different welfare centers where she repeatedly stole funds. She held positions as the Deputy Director at the Willis Income Support Center, the Boulevard Income Center, and the Concourse Income Support Center, all located in the Bronx. As Deputy Director, SANTOS was responsible for authorizing and issuing emergency assistance funds designated for clients who were facing eviction from their homes for failing to pay back rent. The investigation revealed that SANTOS produced fraudulent emergency assistance paperwork and submitted it to be processed for payment. The checks generated from the paperwork were usually two party checks and were made out to both the client and the landlord. In this fashion, SANTOS stole over \$112,000 in public assistance benefits.

Among the individuals named as payees on the checks were CHARLES TORRES, who was falsely named landlord, and DORIS WALKER TORRES, who was falsely named as a client. Many of the checks were deposited directly into the personal bank account of Mr. TORRES, some of the checks were cashed at the Bronx post office where he worked as a clerk. In addition, other checks were deposited into a joint personal bank account that SANTOS held with her aunt who was also named landlord on the checks, but had no knowledge of the scheme; other emergency assistance checks were cashed by SANTOS at a Bronx check cashing facility.

An investigation of the other clients named by SANTOS as recipients of the funds revealed that the funds were never received by them. Many of the falsely named clients were friends and family of CHARLES TORRES and his wife DORIS WALKER TORRES. Additional individuals falsely named as clients could not be located or did not know how the identifying information about them had been obtained. Several of the addresses given for the clients did not exist. Not one of the falsely named clients had ever lived at the addresses given in the benefits paperwork.

Today's indictments stem from a 1997 investigation into the theft of emergency assistance funds from HRA's Willis Income Support Center in the Bronx.

Grand Larceny in the Second Degree is a class C felony which punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Grand Larceny in the Third Degree is a class D felony which is punishable by up to 7 years in prison. Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree is a class E felony which is punishable by up to 4 years in prison.

For their role in the investigation, Mr. Morgenthau thanked: Gerard Hoey, DOI Inspector General for the HRA; Benjamin Defibaugh, DOI Deputy Inspector General for the HRA; Mauricio Kasianko, DOI Confidential Investigator for the HRA; HRA's Office of Fiscal and Program Integrity under the direction of Joel Fishelson; and th United States Postal Inspection Service.

Assistant District Attorneys Polly Samuels and Marcy Chelmow presented the case to the grand jury and will be in charge of the prosecution, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Bridget Fleming, Chief of the Welfare Fraud Unit.