



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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FIVE INDIVIDUALS CHARGED IN \$82,000 HOUSING FRAUD IN QUEENS

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), and RICHARD A. BROWN, Queens District Attorney, announced today that five Queens residents, including a United States Postal Service (USPS) Window Clerk and a former U.S. Department of Commerce Administrative Assistant, have been charged with stealing nearly \$83,000 in government rent subsidies.

Two of the defendants charged received Section 8 subsidies for apartments in the Rochdale Village and Jamaica sections of Queens, and the other three reside in the New York City Housing Authority's Ocean Bay, Redfern, and Pomonok Houses, in the Far Rockaway and Flushing sections of Queens. They are accused of stealing, between June 1996 and November 2002, a total of \$82,983 in rent subsidies, in amounts ranging from \$10,842 to \$22,923, by concealing their employment or actual household income and family composition from NYCHA.

Commissioner Gill Hearn and District Attorney Brown said the investigation focused on people who lied about their employment, household income, and/or family composition and thereby fraudulently received subsidized housing benefits from the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). These arrests are part of an ongoing Citywide crackdown by DOI and the local district attorneys, which has, since 1995, resulted in the arrest of 275 residents – including 91 City, State and Federal employees – charged with stealing more than \$5.4 million in rent and welfare subsidies by hiding their income and assets from the City.

Since January 2003 alone, 17 individuals have been arrested for illegally receiving more than \$213,000 in government housing benefits by concealing their employment or household income from NYCHA. So far, 220 cases have resulted in convictions and nearly \$3 million in court-imposed restitution.

NYCHA manages 345 public housing developments providing shelter to over 418,000 tenants. In addition, NYCHA administers a federally-funded leased housing program known as Section 8. Under that program, tenants living in privately-owned dwellings can receive a government rent subsidy. The program presently covers more than 82,000 families.

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Commissioner Gill Hearn said, "The lesson these defendants and others would be wise to learn is that, with so many needy New Yorkers on long waiting lists for affordable public housing, the City will not be deceived into providing apartments to people who do not qualify for the scarce subsidized housing."

District Attorney Brown added, "The defendants are accused of cheating the City by allegedly stealing nearly \$83,000 in rent subsidies at a time when many New Yorkers are facing tough choices regarding housing and employment. The theft of public monies deprives others of much needed support and will not be tolerated."

In today's cases, SHIRLEY WATTS, a United States Postal Service Window Clerk, and resident since 1993 of a four-room apartment in NYCHA's Ocean Bay Houses located in the Far Rockaway section of Queens, was charged with unlawfully obtaining \$19,196 in government rent subsidies from June 1996 through January 2001. Although WATTS has been employed as a Window Clerk by the United States Postal Service since January 1995, earning between \$25,901 and \$45,462 a year, she failed to report this employment and income to NYCHA. Instead, she reported that during the period from June 1996 to January 2001, her household income ranged from \$4,800 to \$8,840 a year and was derived from her employment as a clerical aide at various establishments. As a result, WATTS' rent share during this period ranged from \$131 to \$209 a month, when in fact, she should have been paying maximum rent of \$495 a month.

BELINDA BULLOCK, a home attendant, and resident since June 1996 of a 3-room apartment in NYCHA's Pomonok Houses in the Flushing section of Queens, was charged with unlawfully obtaining \$17,493 in rent subsidies by concealing from NYCHA, between June 1996 and February 2001, the income she received from her employment with People Care Incorporated. From 1996 to 2001, BULLOCK earned between \$19,896 and \$21,196 annually from her full-time job with People Care. However, in her annual Affidavits of Income filed with NYCHA, BULLOCK reported that her household income ranged from \$5,531 to \$13,025 a year from employment as a Home Attendant with Olsten and Gentiva Health Services. BULLOCK's rent share for that time period was between \$138 and \$326 a month, when in fact, she should have paid \$421 a month, the maximum rent for an apartment of that size.

THELMA BELL, a resident since 1976 of a 5-room apartment at NYCHA's Redfern Houses in the Far Rockaway section of Queens, has been charged with illegally obtaining \$22,923 in rent subsidies by concealing from NYCHA, between February 1998 and June 2002, the presence in the apartment of her husband, who earned between \$32,639 and \$40,668 a year from his job as a Motor Vehicle Operator with the New York City Department of Homeless Services. BELL falsely claimed on her Affidavits of Income filed with NYCHA, that her family composition consisted solely of herself and her son. Between 1998 and 2002, BELL's rent share ranged from \$101 to \$333 a month. In fact, BELL should have paid \$619 a month, the maximum rent for a 5-room apartment.

SHEILA ELMORE, a Section 8 recipient since May 1983, and tenant of record for a 5-room apartment in the Rochdale Village section of Queens, has been charged with unlawfully obtaining \$12,529 in rent subsidies from November 2000 to November 2002, by illegally subleasing her subsidized apartment while she resided in her son's home in Saint Albans, Queens. ELMORE vacated her apartment without informing NYCHA and subleased it to an unauthorized individual, while continuing to submit annual re-certification documents indicating that she still resided there.

ACQUANETTA COOPER, a Section 8 recipient since March 1998 and resident of a 5-room apartment in Jamaica, Queens, was charged with concealing from NYCHA, between March 2000 to November 2002, her salary and employment as an Administrative Assistant with the U. S. Department of Commerce and Verizon

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where she was employed as a Field Technician since January 24, 2000, thereby unlawfully receiving \$10,842 in rent subsidies to which she was not entitled. From March 2000 to November 2002, COOPER earned between \$20,652 and \$27,439 a year. In Affidavits of Income filed with NYCHA, between November 11, 1999 and October 20, 2001, COOPER falsely claimed that her family income consisted solely of her husband's employment from Edcar Products Inc., Capital Fire Sprinkler Co. (where he worked as a helper), and/or United Paint (where he was a warehouse worker).

The defendants have each been charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a Class D felony. If convicted, they face up to 7 years in prison.

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanked NYCHA's Borough Management and NYCHA's Leased Housing Departments for their cooperation and assistance during the course of the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner and NYCHA Inspector General Steven A. Pasichow and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspectors General Kevin Smith and James Ernst, Assistant Inspectors General Bergia Telesford and James Hylton, Confidential Investigators Christopher France, Patricia Carvajal, Emily Bizzarro, and Investigative Attorney Lauren Hintz

The Office of Queens District Attorney Richard Brown is prosecuting the cases. Assistant District Attorney Christine Burke, under the supervision of Brian Mich of District Attorney Brown's Economic Crimes Bureau, is handling the prosecutions.

Criminal complaints are merely accusations. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DEFENDANT INFORMATION:

1. SHIRLEY WATTS, 40, of Queens (\$19,196 in rent subsidies)
2. BELINDA BULLOCK, 59, of Queens (\$17,493 in rent subsidies)
3. THELMA BELL, 50, of Queens (\$22,923 in rent subsidies)
4. SHEILA ELMORE, 46, of Queens (\$12,529 in rent subsidies)
- 50 ACQUANETTA COOPER, 32, of Queens (\$10,842 in rent subsidies)

Get the worms out of the Big Apple.

*To make complaints about someone ripping off the city, call **311** or call DOI directly at **212-825-5959**.*

