



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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EX-WEP WORKER ARRESTED IN THEFT OF DCA LICENSING CHECKS ***-- Stole & Cashed Over \$3,500 In Licensee Renewal Checks --***

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of ERIC BELL, a former New York City Work Experience Program (WEP) worker assigned to the Department of Consumer Affairs' (DCA) press office in lower Manhattan, for stealing 21 licensee renewal checks and money orders, totaling \$3,530, and then unlawfully cashing them.

According to Commissioner Gill Hearn, DCA issues between 29,000 and 43,000 licenses and license renewals each year to various businesses and establishments, as part of its responsibility to protect consumers.

Commissioner Gill Hearn said, "The defendant apparently thought his 'insider' access gave him a license to steal, but he could not have been more mistaken. This case is an example of effective inter-agency cooperation and underscores DOI's commitment to stop municipal corruption in its tracks."

The investigation began in January 2002, when the director of DCA's Licensing Division notified DOI that several businesses had reported that they had not received their renewal licenses although their checks had been cashed.

The investigation disclosed that BELL, who was assigned to DCA's press office and was responsible for general clerical duties, allegedly intercepted checks and money orders mailed to the agency by DCA licensees to renew their licenses, and had apparently taken 17 of the checks and 4 money orders, in amounts ranging from \$10 to \$340, and cashed them, over a 6-week period between November 5, 2001, and December 17, 2001. The investigation, which is continuing, further revealed that BELL cashed all of the checks through his personal Citibank savings account.

BELL, 41, of 401 West 19th Street in Manhattan, was charged with Forgery in the Second Degree, Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, and Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, all Class D felonies, and Defrauding the Government, a Class E felony. If convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

Commissioner Gill Hearn expressed her sincere appreciation to DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra, and members of her staff, for their assistance and cooperation in the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by John McMahon, DOI's Inspector General for DCA, and members of his

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staff, including Confidential Investigators Jayme Naberezny and Keri Hayes, and NYPD Detectives Cleveland Baxter and Lynne Silver-Meriwether of the DOI Squad.

The Office of Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney Douglas Kaufman is handling the matter.