



Department of Investigation *Press Release*

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DOI Arrest 8 Workers In \$40,000 Theft Of ACS Computers

THURSDAY, MAY 18, 2000 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of 8 individuals who worked at the Administration for Children's Services' (ACS) lower Manhattan offices -- 1 current and 2 former ACS employees, and 5 others employed by ACS contractors -- in the theft, sale, and illegal possession of 17 laptop computers valued at over \$40,000, 16 of which had been donated to ACS for distribution to college-bound children in foster care.

Commissioner Kuriansky said, "These defendants stand accused of stealing and dealing in expensive state-of-the-art computers that were given to the City to help foster kids gain an equal educational footing with more advantaged students. This kind of conduct by City employees and others is always inexcusable, but is particularly offensive when committed at the expense of hard-working and needy children."

ACS Commissioner Nicholas Scopetta said, "It is outrageous that these individuals would steal from college-bound foster children who have worked hard to beat the odds against them and get accepted to college. We thank the Department of Investigation for acting swiftly in this matter."

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, DOI began an investigation in October 1999, after an ACS internal audit found that numerous laptop computers were missing. The investigation revealed that 2 technical service reps, ELIAS POLANCO and ROBERT SOTO, who were employed by LFI Pyramid Consulting, Inc., an ACS computer support and consulting services contractor, had allegedly stolen 16 Dell computers, each valued at about \$2,300, in August and September 1999, and that SOTO had also stolen a Gateway computer and other equipment, worth more than \$5,000, from an ACS office several months earlier.

The DOI investigation disclosed that, over a 2-month span, POLANCO and SOTO, using a key taken without permission from a supervisor's desk, had entered -- early in the morning before work -- a locked 12th floor office in which the Dell laptops were being temporarily stored, taken the 16 computers, removed them from the ACS building at 150 William Street concealed in knapsacks and duffel bags, and later sold them for \$900, or less, each.

The 6 other defendants, who are accused of having purchased the stolen computers, include: former ACS computer technicians, RALPH BURGOS and CORY NELSON, and an ACS secretary MERCEDES LOPEZ; [*DELETED UPON REQUEST ON MARCH 11, 2002*]; and security guards, CLINTON CASTILLO and CARLOS ROMERO, employed by D.A.O.R. Security, Inc., a private firm contracted by ACS to provide building security.

The investigation further revealed that POLANCO and SOTO each sold 7 of the 16 stolen Dell computers, and that, additionally, POLANCO kept 1 stolen Dell computer for himself, and SOTO kept the Gateway computer for himself and gave 1 stolen Dell computer to a relative. POLANCO sold 2 stolen computers to ROMERO, and 1 each to the 5 other defendants, netting \$4,200. SOTO sold 7 stolen computers to other individuals not yet identified, netting \$2,400.

DOI has so far recovered 6 of the 16 stolen Dell computers, as well as the stolen Gateway computer.

POLANCO, 21, of 82 Hendrix Street, Brooklyn, and SOTO, 24, of 6501 Bergenwood Avenue, North Bergen, NJ, were each charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a Class D felony, and Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Fourth Degree, a Class E felony. If convicted, each faces up to 7 years in prison.

BURGOS, 33, of 831 Manida Street, the Bronx, NELSON, 27, of 1706 Davidson Avenue, the Bronx, LOPEZ, 44, of 501 Woodward Avenue, Ridgewood, Queens, [***DELETED UPON REQUEST ON MARCH 11, 2002***], CASTILLO, 20, of 532 West 163 Street, Manhattan, and ROMERO, 23, of 3300 Bailey Avenue, the Bronx, were each charged with Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Fourth Degree, a Class E felony. If convicted, each faces up to 4 years in prison.

BURGOS, who was hired on April 19, 1999, and earned \$27,310 a year, and, NELSON, who was hired on July 27, 1998, and earned \$33,974 a year, have been terminated by ACS. LOPEZ, who was hired on June 23, 1996, and earns \$25,983 a year, has been suspended by ACS, pending the outcome of disciplinary charges. CASTILLO and ROMERO have been terminated by D.A.O.R. Security. POLANCO and SOTO have resigned from LFI in lieu of termination, and [***DELETED UPON REQUEST ON MARCH 11, 2002***].

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to ACS Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta and his staff for their assistance and cooperation in the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by Gerard Hoey, DOI's Inspector General for ACS, and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspector General Joseph Caputo, Examining Attorney Jodie Ousley, and Confidential Investigator Brian Masmela.

The Office of the New York County District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney Brenda Fischer of the Special Prosecutions Bureau is handling the matter.