



# Department of Investigation

## *Press Release*

**Release # 031-2002**

MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2002

### **DOI ARRESTS BROOKLYN WOMAN IN BAIL SCAM** ***-- Cashed \$3,400 DOF Bail Refund Check Mailed To Her Mother In Queens --***

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of MICHELLE BLAKE for stealing nearly \$3,400 in City funds by fraudulently negotiating a bail refund check the Department of Finance (DOF) had issued to her mother.

According to Commissioner Gill Hearn, DOF's Bureau of Treasury disburses refunds to individuals who have posted cash bail for defendants, once their cases are complete. She noted that some 2,000 bail refund checks are issued each month, and that about \$41 million in bail refund checks was disbursed last year. In the event that an individual who posted bail fails to receive the refund check, a Forgery Claim Affidavit must be completed, in which the person attests that the check was never received and that the endorsement appearing on the original refund check is a forgery.

Commissioner Gill Hearn said that DOI routinely receives copies of all Forgery Claim Affidavits filed with DOF for bail refund checks. She added that DOI began an investigation in February 2001, when DOF forwarded a copy of a Forgery Claim Affidavit filed by BLAKE's mother on January 26, 2001, and further advised that the original \$3,395 bail refund check issued to BLAKE's mother on November 29, 2000, had previously been cashed.

The investigation disclosed that on November 3, 2000, BLAKE's mother had posted \$3,395 bail for her son after his arrest on a robbery charge in Queens.

It further revealed that the original \$3,395 DOF bail refund check, which had been made payable to BLAKE's mother, had been negotiated on December 7, 2000, at Zerega Check Cashing (Zerega), 101-60 Queens Boulevard in Queens. BLAKE who, at the time, lived with her mother in Queens, had presented the DOF bail refund check, containing her mother's purported endorsement, to the clerk at Zerega, and received \$3,395 in cash. The transaction was videotaped.

BLAKE, 27, of 434 Montauk Avenue in Brooklyn, has been charged with Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the First Degree, a Class C felony, and Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a Class D felony. If convicted, she faces up to 15 years in prison.

Commissioner Gill Hearn expressed her sincere appreciation to Finance Commissioner Martha E. Stark and members of her staff for their assistance and cooperation in the investigation.

## DOI Arrests Bklyn Woman In Bail Scam

The investigation was conducted by Vincent E. Green, DOI Assistant Commissioner and Inspector General for DOF, and members of his staff, including DOF Deputy Inspector General Maureen A. Thomas-Lewis, Special Investigator Jeffrey Dolcimascolo, and Confidential Investigator Merrybet Tavaréz, with the assistance of NYPD Detectives Levi Taylor and Richard Clarke of DOI's Investigative Squad.

The case is being prosecuted by the Office of Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown. Assistant District Attorney Sabine Brown, under the supervision of the DA's Integrity Bureau Chief James Liander, is handling the matter.

Members of the public are reminded that a complaint is merely an accusation and is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial in which it is the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.