



Department of Investigation

Press Release

Release # 032-2002

TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 2002

5 INDIVIDUALS CHARGED IN \$97,000 HOUSING FRAUD IN THE BRONX

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), and ROBERT T. JOHNSON, Bronx District Attorney, announced today that 5 Bronx residents have been charged with stealing a total of \$97,637 in government benefits. The investigation focused on people who lied about their employment or household income and thereby fraudulently received subsidized housing benefits from the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).

Commissioner Gill Hearn and District Attorney Johnson said that 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 247 residents -- including 79 City, State and Federal employees -- charged with stealing over \$5 million in rent and welfare subsidies by hiding their income and assets from the City. Since January 2002, 32 individuals have been arrested for illegally receiving more than \$672,000 in government housing benefits by concealing their employment or household income from NYCHA. So far, 182 cases have resulted in convictions and more than \$2.6 million in court-imposed restitution.

NYCHA manages 345 public housing developments providing shelter to more than 535,000 tenants. In addition, NYCHA administers a federally funded housing program known as Section 8. Under that program, eligible tenants living in privately-owned dwellings can receive a government rent subsidy. The program presently covers nearly 75,000 families.

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 simply not be deceived into providing subsidized apartments to people who can well afford to pay more or even live elsewhere."

District Attorney Johnson added, "We will be vigilant in our efforts to protect the interests of the truly needy. Hopefully, the filing of these charges will act as a deterrent to anyone who thinks about breaking the law for personal gain at the expense of those who are less fortunate."

The 5 defendants charged in this case are all Section 8 tenants residing in various sections of the Bronx, including Parkchester, Morris Heights, Fordham, West Farms and Soundview. They are accused of stealing, between August 1991 and August 2001, a total of \$97,637 in public housing benefits from NYCHA, in amounts ranging from \$6,396 to \$30,429, by concealing their employment or actual household income.

5 Individuals Charged In \$97,000 Housing Fraud In The Bronx

In today's cases, ELIZABETH RIVERA, a Section 8 participant since 1986, and a resident of a 4-room apartment on Grand Concourse in the Fordham section of the Bronx, is charged with unlawfully obtaining \$30,429 in rent subsidies by concealing from NYCHA, between August 1991 and June 2001, her salary and employment as an Escort Translator with the Visiting Nurse Services of New York (VNSNY). In the annual Affidavits of Income that RIVERA signed and filed with NYCHA, between February 1991 and February 2000, she failed to accurately report her total income, which ranged between \$9,200 and \$19,200.

MICHELLE DICKENS, a Section 8 recipient from April 1990 to May 2001, and a resident of a 4-room apartment on Leland Avenue in the West Farms section of the Bronx, has been charged with concealing from NYCHA, between September 1996 and May 2001, the extent of the income she received from a law firm, Skolnick Hochberg & Bernfeld, P.C., in Manhattan, for which she worked as a legal secretary. From 1995 to May 2000, DICKENS earned between more than \$21,000 and \$45,000 a year. In Affidavits of Income filed with NYCHA, between March 1996 and March 2000, DICKENS failed to report her total income received for the periods covered in the Affidavits. By failing to report her total employment and income, DICKENS received \$22,739 in rent subsidies for which she was not entitled.

EVA WILLIAMS, a former Section 8 participant and a tenant of record for a 4-room apartment on Boynton Avenue in the Soundview section of the Bronx, has been charged with unlawfully obtaining \$21,365.65 in rent subsidies, from September 1997 to January 2000, by illegally subleasing her subsidized apartment while she resided elsewhere. WILLIAMS vacated her Bronx apartment without informing NYCHA, and subleased it to an unauthorized family, while continuing to submit annual re-certification documents indicating that she still resided there.

CHARLENE FLEMING, a Teacher's Assistant, has been charged with fraudulently receiving \$16,708 in rent subsidies from May 1998 to August 2001. FLEMING, a Section 8 participant since December 1991, received rent subsidies for a 4-room apartment at Richman Plaza in the Morris Heights section. In 4 Affidavits of Income that FLEMING signed and filed with NYCHA, between December 1997 and November 2000, she failed to report her income earned from her jobs with the Volunteers of America and Herbert G. Birch Early Childhood Center, Inc., in the Bronx.

ANTONIA IGE-OSODE has been charged with fraudulently receiving \$6,396 in rent subsidies from May 1999 to December 2000. IGE-OSODE, a Section 8 resident since 1994, and a tenant of a 4-room apartment on Metropolitan Oval in the Parkchester section from 1994 through 2000, failed to report her total income received from various employers for whom she worked as a medical assistant.

The 5 defendants have each been charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a Class D felony, and Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, a Class E felony. If convicted, they each face up to 7 years in prison.

Commissioner Gill Hearn and District Attorney Johnson expressed their sincere appreciation to the DA's Detective Squad and NYCHA's Leased Housing Department for its cooperation and assistance in the investigations.

The investigation was conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner and NYCHA Inspector General Steven A. Pasichow and members of his staff, Deputy Inspector General Kevin Smith, Investigative Attorney Karen Cohen, Assistant Inspector General Bergia Telesford, Chief Investigator Rosemary Caruso, and Confidential Investigator Michelle Purnavel.

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The prosecutions are being handled by Assistant District Attorneys Pina Terranova, Earamichia Brown, Jose Arocho, Robert Bergida, and David Staton, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Richard Baker, Chief, and Assistant District Attorney Andrew Kampel, of District Attorney Johnson's Arson, Auto, and Economic Crimes Bureau.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
STEVEN REED (BX.DA)
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DEFENDANT INFORMATION:

- ELIZABETH RIVERA, 47, of Grand Concourse, Apt. 5G, Bronx (\$30,429.44 in rent subsidies)
- MICHELLE DICKENS, 36, of Leland Avenue, Apt. 2R, Bronx (\$22,739.12 in rent subsidies)
- EVA WILLIAMS, 29, of Warren Street in Brooklyn, formerly of Boynton Avenue, Apt. 2F, Bronx (\$21,365.40 in rent subsidies)
- CHARLENE FLEMING, 34, of Richman Plaza, Apt. 13B, Bronx (\$16,708 in rent subsidies)
- ANTONIA IGE-OSODE, 30, of Third Avenue, Apt. B, Bronx, formerly of Metropolitan Oval, Apt. 5F, Bronx (\$6,396 in rent subsidies)