



Department of Investigation

Press Release

Release # 055-2000

Charter Bus Driver Arrested For Stealing Columbia U. Passenger's Check *- Then Forged Check To Pay \$543 In City Parking Fines And Retrieve Towed Car-*

Release Date -- FRIDAY, JULY 7, 2000

EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), ROBERT M. MORGENTHAU, Manhattan District Attorney, and HOWARD SAFIR, Police Commissioner, today announced the felony arrest of JAMES D. WILLIAMS, JR., a bus driver employed by the Academy Bus Service, a charter company used by Columbia University's athletic teams, for stealing a blank check from a passenger's checkbook, forging and sending it to the City's Parking Violations Operations (PVO) to pay off \$543 in parking tickets, and later using the PVO receipt to retrieve his car from a city marshal's tow-yard.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, the investigation disclosed that WILLIAMS, in February, mailed PVO the stolen and forged check, on which he had written the license plate number of his 1988 Honda Civic, together with copies of 2 parking tickets issued to his car in January. PVO then deposited the check in a City Department of Finance (DOF) bank account and credited the \$543 payment to WILLIAMS. On March 1, however, PVO contacted the victim passenger for clarification, because the victim's name, as printed on the bogus check, was different than that of the car's registered owner. The victim informed PVO that the check had been stolen and forged, and he thereafter reported the incident to the police.

The investigation further revealed that, on March 22, a city marshal had seized WILLIAMS' car, because PVO records still indicated that the car's registered owner -- WILLIAMS' sister-in-law -- owed overdue parking fines totaling \$492. On April 4, however, WILLIAMS obtained from PVO a "zero release" order based on PVO records showing that he had previously made a \$543 payment. That order directed the marshal to allow WILLIAMS to take possession of the car without further charge.

WILLIAMS thereafter redeemed the car on April 7 from the city marshal, but, because the car lacked insurance, PVO instructed the marshal to remove the car's license plates and turn them in to the State Department of Motor Vehicles. In June, after WILLIAMS called DOI to complain that the marshal had not given him a letter confirming the license plate surrender, DOI investigators learned of the stolen check and that WILLIAMS was being sought by the police. DOI then joined the NYPD and the DA's Office in the investigation which shortly led to WILLIAMS' arrest.

WILLIAMS, 36, of the Bronx, was charged with Forgery in the Second Degree, a Class D felony, and Petit Larceny, a Class A misdemeanor. If convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to District Attorney Morgenthau, Police Commissioner Safir, and Finance Commissioner Andrew S. Eristoff, and members of their staffs, for their assistance and cooperation in the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Ivan Cortes of the NYPD's 26th Precinct Detective Squad, and DOI Marshals Bureau Chief Auditor Percy Corcoran and Confidential Investigator Teresa Pinckney.

Assistant District Attorney Chris DiMenna of the DA's Trial Bureau 30 is prosecuting the case.