



The City of New York  
Department of Investigation

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**NYCHA TENANT CHARGED IN \$23,000 WELFARE AND  
HOUSING FRAUD IN BROOKLYN**

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), and PAUL BALUKAS, New York State Welfare Inspector General, announced today the arrest of MARIA MEJIAS for allegedly stealing more than \$23,000 in government rent subsidies and welfare benefits.

MEJIAS, 34, of Brooklyn, has been charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a Class D Felony; Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, a Class D Felony; and Offering a False Instrument for Filing, a Class E Felony. If convicted, she faces up to 7 years in prison.

MEJIAS -- a Public Assistance recipient residing in a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Section 8 subsidized five-room apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn -- filed forms in May and December 2001 with the Human Resources Administration (HRA) claiming that only she and her six children lived in the apartment and that her only income was from hourly wages at Big K-Mart. Based upon this reporting, MEJIAS was eligible for Public Assistance and subsequently received welfare checks worth \$8,533 and food stamp benefits worth \$9,307 between May 2001 and December 2002.

In December 2000 and June 2001, MEJIAS filed Affidavits of Income with NYCHA's Leased Housing Section 8 program, in which she claimed that her husband was not a member of her household and that her only income was Public Assistance and hourly wages at Big K-Mart. Based upon these filings, NYCHA found MEJIAS eligible for Section 8 rent subsidy benefits and subsequently gave her rent subsidies worth \$16,669 from January 2001 to July 2002. That month, the apartment failed its annual inspection and NYCHA suspended Section 8 subsidies to the landlord.

DOI and OWIG investigators found that MEJIAS' husband lived with her and was employed at Boro Kitchen Cabinets, Inc. DOI and OWIG investigators determined that MEJIAS alleged false claims enabled her to receive \$17,158 in Public Assistance and Food Stamp benefits from HRA and \$5,942 in Section 8 subsidies from NYCHA

This arrest is part of an on-going City-wide crackdown by DOI and local prosecutors that has, since 1995, resulted in the arrest of 285 residents, including 93 City, State and Federal employees. They have been charged with stealing more than \$5.6 million in rent and welfare subsidies by hiding their income and assets from the City. So far, 223 cases have resulted in convictions and nearly \$3.6 million in court-imposed restitution.

Since January 2003, 27 individuals have been arrested for illegally receiving more than \$372,000 in government housing benefits by concealing their employment or household income from NYCHA.

DOI Commissioner Gill Hearn and Welfare Inspector General Balukas thanked HRA's Bureau of Fraud Investigation for their cooperation and assistance with this case.

At DOI, this investigation was conducted by Assistant Commissioner and NYCHA Inspector General Steven A. Pasichow and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspector General Kevin Smith and Confidential Investigator Patricia Carvajal. At the New York State Welfare Inspector General's Office, this investigation was conducted by Paul Balukas and members of his staff, including Confidential Investigator Gabriel Camacho.

The Office of Attorney General Eliot Spitzer is prosecuting the matter. Special Assistant Attorney General Andrew Weiss is handling the prosecution.

Criminal complaints are merely accusations. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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To report someone ripping off the City, call 311 or DOI directly at (212) 825-5959.***