



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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DOI Arrests HRA Eligibility Specialist For Stealing Over \$2,300 In Welfare Benefits

-Used PA Recipient's Electronic Benefit Card To Get Groceries & Cash-

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2000

EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the arrest of SUSANNE RICKENBACKER, a City Human Resources Administration (HRA) eligibility specialist, for stealing over \$2,300 in public assistance (PA) benefits by unlawfully using a client's electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card to obtain groceries and make ATM cash withdrawals.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, DOI began an investigation in July after HRA notified DOI that RICKENBACKER had allegedly obtained a client's EBT card and was using it improperly to collect benefits from the client's account.

Commissioner Kuriansky noted that EBT cards are issued to New York City welfare recipients to enable them to make electronic transactions for food and cash benefits. The EBT card system was started in March 1999 and is used citywide.

The investigation disclosed that on May 31, 2000, RICKENBACKER obtained an EBT card from one of her clients -- a 35-year-old woman -- by falsely informing the recipient, during a meeting, that HRA policy required her to surrender her EBT card to RICKENBACKER. The client, who had been receiving public assistance since 1996, had requested the meeting with RICKENBACKER to inform RICKENBACKER that she had obtained employment as a Head Start program clerk and would no longer require PA benefits.

The investigation further revealed that from June 1, 2000, to July 19, 2000, RICKENBACKER used the woman's EBT card on 10 occasions to withdraw a total of about \$1,885 from various ATMs in Queens, including 8 instances at a North Fork Bank branch on Sutphin Boulevard near HRA's Jamaica Income Support Center, where RICKENBACKER worked. RICKENBACKER also used the card, on 12 other occasions, to buy a total of about \$450 in groceries at 4 different stores on Jamaica Avenue.

RICKENBACKER, 45, of 147-13A Jamaica Avenue, Jamaica, Queens, has been charged with Tampering with Public Records in the First Degree, a Class D felony, and Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree, a Class E felony. If convicted, she faces up to 7 years in prison. RICKENBACKER, who was hired by HRA on August 16, 1982, and earns \$28,656 a year, has been suspended pending the outcome of the case.

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to HRA Commissioner Jason A. Turner and

members of his staff for their assistance and cooperation in the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by Gerard Hoey, DOI's Inspector General for HRA, and members of his staff, including Examining Attorney Seth Gordon, Assistant Inspector General Margaret Shivers, and Confidential Investigator Frank Delisi.

The Office of the Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney Dan O' Leary of the DA's Integrity Bureau, headed by Assistant District Attorney 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.