



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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3 Individuals--Including City DEP And Union Employees Charged With \$26,000 Housing Fraud On Queens

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2000

EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), and RICHARD A. BROWN, Queens District Attorney, today announced that 3 individuals -- including a City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) employee and her mother, a former CWA Local 1180 fund administrator -- have been charged with stealing nearly \$26,000 in government rent subsidies. The investigation focused on people who lied about their employment or household income and thereby fraudulently received subsidized housing benefits from New York City.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky and District Attorney Brown, the arrests are part of an ongoing citywide investigation by DOI and the local district attorneys, which has, since 1995, resulted in the arrest of 183 tenants charged with stealing over \$3.7 million in rent subsidy and welfare benefits by concealing their income and assets from the City. To date, 133 cases have resulted in conviction and over \$1.7 million in court-imposed restitution.

In addition to today's charges, within the last 5 months alone, 33 other individuals -- including 2 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) employees, 5 City teachers, 2 Human Resources Administration (HRA) caseworkers, a Police Department Traffic Enforcement Unit tow truck driver, a Health Department nurse, and a State Attorney General's clerk -- have been arrested for lying about their employment or household income and fraudulently receiving nearly \$795,000 in government housing and welfare benefits.

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

District Attorney Brown said, "The theft of public monies is a serious offense that can deprive others of much needed support. It will not be ignored by law enforcement no matter what the amount involved."

NYCHA manages 346 public housing developments providing shelter to over 535,000 tenants. In addition, NYCHA administers a federally funded leased housing program known as Section 8. Under that program, needy tenants living in privately owned dwellings can receive a government rent subsidy. The program presently covers more than 76,400 families.

The DEP employee, Subrina Sarjoo Ogeer, a senior community liaison worker in DEP's New York City Water Board office at 59-17 Junction Boulevard in Corona, Queens, who earns an annual salary of \$37,250, is

charged with failing to report to NYCHA, in 1998, her DEP employment and income from October 1997 through December 1997, when she earned a total of \$4,881; with substantially underreporting, in 1996 and 1997, by over \$36,000, her income from Local 1180, Communication Workers of America (CWA), where she was employed as a clerk-typist from February 1993 until October 1997; and with concealing on income verification forms, from 1995 to 1998, her grandparents' ownership of a home in St. Petersburg, Florida, which they had purchased in 1988 for \$77,500 (her grandmother was listed as the principal tenant on the apartment lease) -- thereby improperly obtaining rent subsidies totaling \$7,746 between June 1993 and July 1998.

Ogeer, from 1996 to 1998, resided in her grandparents' 4-room apartment at NYCHA's Pomonok Houses, 67-29 Kissena Boulevard, Flushing, while her grandparents were living in Florida. In 1996, the apartment rent was \$250 a month, and by 1998, the rent had risen to \$265 a month. In fact, during those 3 years, Ogeer should have paid \$495 a month rent, the maximum rent for a NYCHA apartment of that size.

Yvonne Singh, Ogeer's mother, the former fund administrator of Local 1180, is charged with falsifying her daughter's NYCHA summary of earnings forms, and underreporting Ogeer's actual income from Local 1180 in 1996 and 1997. Singh reported that Ogeer's 1996 union salary was \$5,400, when, in fact, Ogeer earned \$24,966, and that Ogeer's 1997 salary was \$10,400, when, in fact, Ogeer earned \$26,878.

Lillian Ortiz, a former assistant bookkeeper for the Merton D. Simpson Gallery at 1063 Madison Avenue in Manhattan, who earned \$14,621 in 1994, \$26,500 in 1995, \$34,750 in 1996, and \$17,504 in 1997, is charged with failing to report to NYCHA, between 1994 and 1997, employment income totaling \$41,545, thereby illegally obtaining \$18,239 in rent subsidies between March 1995 and February 1999, and with forging 2 fellow employees' signatures on summary of earnings forms she submitted to NYCHA in 1995, 1996, and 1997. Ortiz, a tenant in the Section 8 Leased Housing Program, rented a subsidized 6-room apartment at 5836 83rd Street, Queens, from 1991 until earlier this year. In 1995, her rent was \$310 a month, and, by 1999, her rent had risen to \$417 a month. In fact, she should have paid \$731 a month rent in 1995, and \$745 a month rent by 1998.

The defendants have been variously charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, Forgery in the Second Degree, and Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, all Class D felonies punishable by up to 7 years in prison, and with Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree, and Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, all Class E felonies punishable by up to 4 years in prison.

Commissioner Kuriansky and District Attorney Brown expressed their appreciation to NYCHA's Borough Management and Leased Housing Departments for their cooperation and assistance during the course of the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner and NYCHA Inspector General Steven A. Pasichow and members of his staff, including Special Investigator Chris France and Confidential Investigator Louis Vega.

The prosecutions are being handled by Assistant District Attorney Lourdes Ventura under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Brian Mich of the DA's Economic Crimes Bureau.

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.

DEFENDANT INFORMATION

* 1. Subrina Sarjoo Ogeer, 30, of Queens, was charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree (\$7,746 in rent subsidies); 5 counts of Forgery in the Second Degree; 5 counts of Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree; 1 count of Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree; 5 counts of Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree; and 5 counts of Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree.

2. Lillian Ortiz, 48, currently of Brooklyn, was charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree (\$18,239 in rent subsidies); 6 counts of Forgery in the Second Degree; 6 counts of Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree; 10 counts of Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree; and 10 counts of Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree.

3. Yvonne Singh, 49, of Queens, was charged with Forgery in the Second Degree, 2 counts of Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree; and 2 counts of Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree.

* City employee

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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