



The City of New York  
Department of Investigation

ROSE GILL HEARN  
COMMISSIONER

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**Release # 65-2003**  
**nyc.gov/html/doi**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2003**

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**FOUR INDIVIDUALS ARRESTED IN \$115,000 HOUSING FRAUD**

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), announced today the arrest of four current and former residents of the New York City Housing Authority for fraudulently receiving more than \$115,000 in government rent subsidies for apartments in Brooklyn.

Three defendants -- LATONYA DECKER, MARIA RIVERA and ROGELIO SANTIAGO -- have been charged with filing false documents and theft of public monies. An arrest warrant has been issued for a fourth defendant, LOIS DECKER. The defendants allegedly concealed income so that they could receive rent subsidies ranging from \$16,000 to \$48,000. If convicted, they each face up to a maximum of 10 years in jail. A fifth defendant, REGINA KEARSE, was solely charged with theft of public monies for allegedly concealing her income while receiving \$33,595 in Section 8 subsidies. If convicted, she, too, faces up to 10 years in jail.

These arrests are part of an ongoing City-wide crackdown by DOI and New York area prosecutors that has resulted since 1995 in the arrest of 289 residents, including 94 City, State and Federal employees, who were charged with stealing more than \$5.7 million in rent and welfare subsidies by hiding their income and assets from the City. So far, 237 cases have resulted in convictions and more than \$3.1 million in court-imposed restitution.

Since January 2003 alone, 31 individuals have been arrested for illegally receiving more than \$487,000 in government housing benefits by concealing their employment or household income from NYCHA.

NYCHA manages 345 public developments, which provide housing to more than 418,000 tenants. In addition, NYCHA administers a federally-funded leased housing program known as Section 8. Under that program, tenants living in privately-owned dwellings can receive a government rent subsidy. The program presently covers more than 83,000 families.

Commissioner Rose 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 not be deceived into providing apartments to people who do not qualify for the scarce subsidized housing."

In today's cases, KEARSE, a Section 8 recipient since 1993 and resident of a 5 room apartment in the Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, was charged with concealing from NYCHA, between September 1995 to March 2001, her employment and income earned as a General Service Associate with the Brooklyn Hospital Center, thereby unlawfully receiving \$33,595.44 in rent subsidies. From 1995 to 2001, Kearsse earned between \$20,969 to \$31,402 a year. In Affidavits of Income filed with NYCHA between 1993 to 2001, Kearsse falsely claimed that her family income consisted solely of Public Assistance. During this time, she paid anywhere from \$50 to \$178.35 a month in rent when she should have been paying \$595.35.

LOIS DECKER, for whom an arrest warrant has been issued, has been a NYCHA resident since 1975 at Albany Houses in the Weeksville section of Brooklyn. She informed NYCHA in 1994 that she was retiring from her employment at the New York City Department of Correction and relocating to North Carolina. LOIS' daughter, LATONYA DECKER, a public

assistance recipient, became the tenant of record for the apartment. Once LATONYA became the tenant of record, the rent was decreased from \$635 a month to \$169 a month. Investigators determined, however, that LOIS DECKER did not move out of the apartment and that she remained gainfully employed by DOC as the Director of Toxicology until her retirement in October 2002. Their actions caused NYCHA to be defrauded of about \$48,872 from 1995 to 2002.

MARIA RIVERA, a resident of NYCHA's Wyckoff Gardens in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, concealed from NYCHA that her brother, a New York City Correction Officer assigned to the Brooklyn Court Division, also lived in the 4 1/2 room apartment. From January 1, 1997 to March 31, 2001, RIVERA failed to report to NYCHA her brother's earnings, which ranged from \$45,696 to \$64,446 a year. As a result, RIVERA paid rent ranging from \$96 to \$316 per month during that period of time. If she had reported her brother's income, RIVERA would have paid the maximum rent of \$495 per month for the apartment. RIVERA's actions caused NYCHA to be defrauded in the amount of \$16,163.

Without NYCHA's permission, ROGELIO SANTIAGO, a New York City Human Resources Electrician's Helper, took over occupancy of a NYCHA Surfside Gardens apartment, which was leased to Eugenio Perez. Perez, an elderly tenant and a friend of SANTIAGO's father, moved from the NYCHA apartment and failed to inform NYCHA. On one occasion, SANTIAGO arranged for a friend to go to NYCHA's Management Office and impersonate Perez when it was time for the elderly tenant to submit Affidavits of Income. From January 1, 1997 to March 31, 2002, Perez's rent, which ranged from \$139 to \$174 a month for the 3 1/2 room apartment, was based on supplemental security income and a pension. SANTIAGO's earnings for that period ranged from \$39,673 to \$43,355. As a result of SANTIAGO's actions, NYCHA was defrauded in the amount of approximately \$16,712.

Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn thanked NYCHA's Leased Housing and Borough Management Departments and the United States Housing and Urban Development's Office of the Inspector General for their assistance in the investigations and arrests.

The investigations were conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner and NYCHA Inspector General Steven A. Pasichow and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspectors General Kevin Smith, James Ernst, and Edward Glander and Special Investigators Christopher France and Michael Wilk and Confidential Investigator Patricia Carvajal and Investigative Attorneys Lauren Hintz and Rachel Adler.

The Office of Roslynn R. Mauskopf, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, is prosecuting the cases. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Adam Abensohn, Taryn A. Merkl, Robert Radick, and Robert Henoch are handling the prosecutions.

Criminal complaints are merely an accusation. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country. The agency investigates and refers for prosecution City employees and contractors engaged in corrupt or fraudulent activities or unethical conduct. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City.

#### **DEFENDANT INFORMATION:**

1. Regina Kearse, 44, of Stuyvesant, Brooklyn (\$33,595 in rent subsidies)
2. Latonya Decker, 34, of Weeksville, Brooklyn (\$48,872 in rent subsidies)
3. Maria Rivera, 43, of Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, (\$16,163 in rent subsidies)
4. Rogelio Santiago, 42, of Mount Eden, Bronx (\$16,712 in rent subsidies)

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