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STATEMENT BY DOI COMMISSIONER ROSE GILL HEARN ON JUDITH LEEKIN'S 130-MONTH PRISON SENTENCE
- Leekin's \$1.68 Million Adoption-Subsidy Fraud Harmed 11 Vulnerable Children Consigned to her Control -

U.S. District Judge Richard M. Berman's sentencing of Judith Leekin to more than 10 years in prison today is a just and powerful admonition of an individual who deliberately ensnared 11 defenseless children in a cynical get-rich scheme, played out over nearly 20 years, in which she misappropriated \$1.68 million of public money and stole something much more precious and irreplaceable - their childhoods. Leekin spun a web of lies to secure the adoption of those children, gained control of the money intended for their care, used it to acquire material wealth and a comfortable lifestyle for herself, and deprived them of the most basic kinds of care that parents provide for their children, such as nourishment, medical and dental treatment and schooling. She has now been held accountable, and for that I thank the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and DOI's investigators who tirelessly reconstructed and exposed Leekin's fraud to ensure that she faced justice in New York, where this disturbing case began.

The facts of this investigation were so egregious that DOI took the unusual step of submitting a letter to the judge underscoring the need for a sentence reflecting the seriousness of the offense, a step this agency has taken on only two other occasions during the more than six years in which I have served as Commissioner.

DOI's investigation, together with the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's Office, began last year, when the Florida authorities contacted us in connection with their pursuit of a criminal probe of the abuse of the children in Leekin's custody in that state. The alarming facts were unprecedented among DOI cases, and we set about tracing the origin of the adoption subsidies in New York and the fraud perpetrated by Leekin. The investigation found that by using fictitious names and filing false adoption recertification forms, Leekin perverted the adoption subsidy program for disabled children by exploiting its vulnerabilities in distributing those subsidies.

As a result of the Leekin investigation, DOI bore into the adoption process and found inadequacies. This case demonstrates, quite profoundly, that the process must be strengthened. DOI will continue its discussions with the City's Administration for Children's Services about how that can be accomplished.

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.

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