



The City of New York  
Department of Investigation

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**DOI STATEMENT ON THE GUILTY PLEA BY A FORMER COMPUTER DIRECTOR AT THE CITY MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE TO DEFRAUDING THE AGENCY OF MILLIONS IN SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> FUNDS**

NATARAJAN "RAJU" VENKATARAM, the former Director of Management Information Systems ("MIS") at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the City of New York ("OCME"), pleaded guilty today in U.S District Court in Manhattan in connection with the theft of millions of dollars, much of which was from federal funds meant for the creation of a computer system to track and identify forensic evidence collected to help identify victims of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks at Ground Zero. VENKATARAM, 43, pleaded guilty to one count of Conspiracy, one count of Embezzlement and 14 counts of Money Laundering.

VENKATARAM is scheduled to be sentenced on January 30, 2008 and faces up to 295 years in prison under the sentencing guidelines. His guilty plea follows that of ROSA ABREU, 40, OCME's former Director of Records, who pleaded guilty last week in U.S. District Court in Manhattan to one count of Conspiracy; one count of Embezzlement from OCME; and three counts of Money Laundering.

Following over a year of covert investigation by the Department of Investigation ("DOI"), the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York charged ABREU and VENKATARAM with embezzling millions of dollars that had been provided to OCME. The majority of the funds came from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). VENKATARAM and ABREU were charged with submitting invoices for goods and services that were never provided or by padding invoices for computer services and software purchases following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "This case is all the more egregious because the individuals who pleaded guilty exploited a national tragedy for their own gain. Their actions were a display of brazen greed and utter disregard for the responsibilities entrusted to them at the Medical Examiner's Office. The successful investigation and prosecution should serve as a warning to those who think no one is safeguarding funds that come to the City. DOI will continue to remain vigilant and work with state and federal prosecutors to combat these crimes."

DOI's investigation began in 2004 after DOI was alerted about suspicions over VENKATARAM's procurement practices at OCME. DOI investigators unraveled a complex scheme

through which VENKATARAM and ABREU steered numerous OCME computer contracts to several companies that performed little or no work for OCME. These companies, in turn, either forwarded the funds fraudulently obtained from OCME to three shell companies created by VENKATARAM and ABREU or laundered the funds through a dozen other companies and/or individuals at VENKATARAM's direction.

VENKATARAM and ABREU resigned from OCME in September 2005.

DOI thanks the Office of Michael J. Garcia, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Assistant United States Attorneys Andrew Dember and Arlo Devlin-Brown of that office, for the successful prosecution of this matter.

The investigation was conducted by Inspector General for the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Christopher Staackmann, Deputy Inspector General Stephan Zander, Counsel to the Inspector General Andrea Hecht, Assistant Inspector General Bradley Howard, Special Investigators Byron Biggerstaff and John Eleftheriades, Confidential Investigator Danielle Caruso, Associate Commissioner Yuval Hibshoosh, Investigative Auditors Laila Jane Yu, Helen Gromadsky, Lana Wong and Maggie Xu.

*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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