



NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Inspector General
Catherine Leahy Scott

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NYS INSPECTOR GENERAL ANNOUNCES ARREST OF 11 FOR SCHEME TO USE EBT CARDS STOLEN FROM MENTAL HEALTH RESIDENTS

*State employees at mental health facility alleged
to have stolen cards from facility residents*

New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott announced the arrest of two New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) employees and nine other individuals, all of whom were charged with the illegal use of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards belonging to residents living in mental health facilities in Syracuse and Dewitt. Altogether more than \$17,000 in fraudulent purchases were made over a two year period with the cards.

Inspector General Scott, who also serves as New York State's Acting Welfare Inspector General, said: "The act of stealing from a system designed to help those who legitimately require assistance is egregious enough. But to steal cards from people who are totally dependent on your care is particularly deplorable. These alleged acts are made worse still by selling the cards to others who take advantage of the system for their own benefit. I will continue to work closely with Onondaga County District Attorney William Fitzpatrick and his office to ensure the defendants are held fully accountable for any criminal acts committed, and that restitution is made."

Among those arrested was Alphonso Bradshaw, 62, of Syracuse, a Therapy Aide for Hutchings Psychiatric Center (HPC) community residences located in the Syracuse area. Bradshaw allegedly stole EBT cards from nine HPC residents in his care and sold them to friends and family for half the value of the benefits on the cards. In addition, Ethalyn Crowder, 51, a Therapy Aide at HPC from Syracuse, was charged with stealing an HPC resident's card and making multiple unauthorized purchases.

Inspector General Scott's investigation revealed that multiple unlawful purchases were made with these cards in the Syracuse region, and that the HPC residents who owned the EBT cards were completely unaware their cards were being used. The total in unauthorized charges – which reached \$17,332.90 and included large purchases of items such as crab legs, steak and shrimp – took place between January 2012 and February 2014.

Onondaga County District Attorney William J. Fitzpatrick said: "Rooting out and aggressively pursuing welfare fraud has been one of my top priorities as District Attorney of Onondaga County. This case is troubling on two levels, first because truly needy individuals who were dependent on public assistance were victimized and second, because those who allegedly stole the cards ripped off taxpayers. We appreciate the investigative work performed by the Inspector General's Office and the assistance of the Dewitt Police Department and the New York State Police in helping to build our case for prosecution."

Town of DeWitt Police Chief Eugene J. Conway, whose department assisted in the investigation said: "The Town of DeWitt Police Department will investigate any and all complaints about welfare fraud. The

fraudulent acts allegedly committed here by the defendants were made all the worse by the fact that they took advantage of victims who had no chance to protect their property. I want to thank Inspector General Scott and her staff for the tremendous work they did on this case.”

In New York State, EBT cards are used by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) to deliver SNAP and cash benefits to those who qualify. SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps, and cash benefits are deposited into qualified recipients’ electronic benefit accounts. These benefits can be accessed at participating ATM machines and stores throughout New York using an EBT card.

Alphonso Bradshaw was charged with felony counts of Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Fourth Degree and the Misuse of Food Stamps, and misdemeanor counts of Misuse of Food Stamps, Official Misconduct, and Conspiracy in the Fifth Degree.

Crowder was charged with a felony count of Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Fourth Degree, and misdemeanor counts of Misuse of Food Stamps and Official Misconduct.

For their involvement in this scheme the following individuals were charged with felony counts of Criminal Possession of Stolen Property, felony and/or misdemeanor counts of Misuse of Food Stamps, and misdemeanor counts of Conspiracy for allegedly making purchases on the cards they obtained from Bradshaw:

- Tamara Bachus, 44, Clay, N.Y.
- Evelyn Bradshaw, 61, Syracuse, N.Y.
- Rashida (Mays) Cunningham, 33, Syracuse, N.Y.
- Shirley Davis, 59, Syracuse, N.Y.
- Larry L. Homer, 39, Syracuse, N.Y.
- Chandrikka Skipp, 41, Liverpool, N.Y.
- Diane M. Houston, 49, Syracuse, N.Y.
- Deborah Johnson, 51, Syracuse, N.Y.
- David Skipp, 49, Liverpool, N.Y.

The defendants were arraigned before the Hon. Kate Rosenthal of Syracuse City Court.

Inspector General Scott thanked the DeWitt Police Department and OMH for their assistance in this investigation, and the New York State Police for assisting in the arrests. She additionally thanked Onondaga County District Attorney Fitzpatrick and his office for prosecuting these cases.

The defendants are deemed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

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