



# NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE WELFARE INSPECTOR GENERAL

**Catherine Leahy Scott – Acting Welfare Inspector General**

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## **QUEENS MAN, IMPERSONATING DECEASED TWIN BROTHER, CHARGED WITH STEALING MORE THAN HALF MILLION DOLLARS IN WELFARE BENEFITS**

New York State Acting Welfare Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott and Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced the arrest of a Queens man who was charged with defrauding federal, state and city government agencies of more than \$581,000 in welfare benefits from 1994 to 2013. He allegedly did so by impersonating his twin brother, who died in 1962 shortly after his birth.

“This is an outrageous theft of benefits, moneys that are intended for those truly in need,” said Inspector General Scott. “The defendant is charged with stealing more than a half million dollars in welfare benefits; utilizing an intricate plot to ensure a constant cash flow of government benefits he was not entitled to, and by assuming a false identity for nearly two decades. As a result of my investigation, together with our partners in law enforcement, this fraud was uncovered and the defendant brought to justice.”

Thomas Murphy, 52, of Queens is charged in one complaint with two counts of second-degree grand larceny, one count of second-degree welfare fraud, one count of first degree identity theft, two counts of first-degree falsifying business records and two counts of first-degree offering a false instrument for filing. In a second complaint he is charged with one count each of first-and second-degree falsifying business records, first-degree offering a false instrument for filing and one count of making a punishable false written statement. If convicted, he faces up to 15 years in prison on the first complaint and four years in prison on the second complaint.

Queens District Attorney Brown said: “The defendant is accused of concocting a brazen scheme in which he stole the identity of his twin brother – who died shortly after birth – to illegally divert more than half a million dollars in welfare money to pay for his housing, food, medical expenses for nearly 20 years – even during the last eight years when he was employed as a New York City Sanitation worker. With so many needy New Yorkers requiring affordable housing and assistance to put food on the table and pay for medical expenses, the City, State and Federal governments will not be tricked into providing support to persons who can well afford to pay their own way. Thanks to the diligent efforts of Inspector General Scott and her staff, as well as the other governmental agencies involved in this investigation, the defendant will now be held accountable for his alleged actions.”

According to Inspector General Scott, Murphy allegedly committed this theft by using his deceased twin brother Robert’s social security number. Murphy started using his brother’s social security number in October 1994, when he applied for social service benefits in his brother’s name. Murphy continued to impersonate his brother for more than 18 years, and collected these benefits through to November 2013.

The Inspector General’s investigation confirmed that Murphy was otherwise ineligible for the public benefits he received. As an employee of the New York City Department of Sanitation since 2006, Murphy earns approximately \$80,000, and therefore would have been unqualified to receive the benefits.

Evidence obtained during this investigation uncovered an intricate plot by Murphy to ensure the continued cash-flow of fraudulently obtained public benefit moneys. In an effort to conceal his dual identity, Murphy – a lifelong Queens resident – maintained separate addresses and bank accounts in both his and his deceased brother’s names. Murphy also had a New York State commercial driver’s license, and obtained a Class D driver’s license in his deceased brother’s name.

As a result of Murphy’s false filings, he improperly obtained a total of \$581,805.80 in public assistance benefits, as follows: \$216,481.80 from Medicaid, \$15,024 from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), \$209,902 in state rental subsidies, and \$140,398 from the Social Security Administration.

The United States Social Security Administration, (SSA) New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) and New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) assisted Inspector General Scott in her investigation.

Edward J. Ryan, Special Agent in Charge, Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, New York Field Division said: “Our office is committed to investigating and bringing to justice anyone who illegally siphons Social Security funds through fraud and concealment. These funds are intended to be a safety net for the most vulnerable of our society, the elderly and the disabled. I commend the hard work of our partners in this effort, the New York State Welfare Inspector General’s Office. Our agencies have continually worked together to combat fraud not only in Social Security programs but also the government programs of the State of New York.”

New York City Human Resources Administration Commissioner Steven Banks said: “This case demonstrates the importance of guarding taxpayers’ funds and ensuring that benefits are used only by those who really need them. As HRA institutes reforms to improve the delivery of our services, we will also work with our government partners to improve the protections against fraud. I want to thank Inspector General Scott, her staff and the other organizations that together successfully completed this investigation.”

The New York State Welfare Inspector General investigates, and when appropriate refers for prosecution, public benefit recipients who are dishonestly receiving benefits for which they are not eligible. The state welfare programs from which Murphy fraudulently received benefits include Medicaid (available to income-qualifying New Yorkers who are unable to pay for medical care) and SNAP (a federally-funded program which provides benefits to assist low-income New Yorkers – including working people, seniors, and people with disabilities – feed their families).

Murphy was arraigned before the Hon. John F. Zoll of Queens County Criminal Court and is scheduled to return to court October 21. The Queens District Attorney Detective Investigators arrested Murphy with assistance from the New York State Office of Welfare Inspector General, SSA Inspector General, and DMV Division of Field Investigations.

Inspector General Scott thanked the Social Security Administration Inspector General Patrick P. O’Carroll, Jr. and Special Agent in Charge Edward J. Ryan, DMV Commissioner Barbara Fiala, HRA Commissioner Steven Banks and HRA’s Bureau of Fraud Investigation, and OMH for their assistance with her investigation. Inspector General Scott also thanked Queens District Attorney Brown and his staff for prosecuting this matter.

The defendant is deemed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

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