



PRELIMINARY INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT

2005-06-0303

December 29, 2006

MARION COUNTY PUBLIC ASSISTANCE FRAUD - 10

Inspector General David O. Thomas, after an investigation by Special Agent Alan McElroy and Staff Attorney Amanda Schaeffer, reports as follows:

This report addresses the arrest of defendant Denise Johnson, criminally charged with the felony of welfare fraud on May 9, 2006, as a result of an Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigation of Family of Social Services Administration (FSSA) Caseworkers Geraldine Harper and Mary Miracle. Both Harper and Miracle, as well as a Stephanie Russell, were charged and convicted of welfare fraud as a result of the initial OIG investigation. The investigation was then expanded, resulting in this additional arrest.

Public assistance benefits are usually distributed through an Electronic Benefits Transaction (EBT) card. FSSA caseworkers, such as Harper and Miracle, supervise the issuance and maintenance of these EBT cards. This EBT card is similar to an ATM card in that the welfare recipient may withdraw cash

from automatic teller bank machines. One of the benefits in issuing public assistance through EBT cards is that the cash withdrawal transactions are captured by the computer for later investigative purposes.

In this case, Rochell and Denise Johnson received unauthorized EBT cards from Harper. Rochell is the head pastor at the Greater Faith Missionary Baptist Church, which is Harper's church. The Johnsons are both employed as bus drivers for the Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township. Rochell Johnson also earns a salary as head pastor of the church. The Johnsons receive social security disability for Rochell and for their son Josiah. In aggregate, the Johnsons annual income is around \$100,000. In June of 2003, their case was opened at the FSSA by Harper and they received an EBT card. Denise Johnson states that they were told by Harper that they were entitled to food stamps because of Rochell's disability. The Johnsons claim that they provided their income information to Harper and that Harper told them they were entitled to food stamps. However, the OIG obtained correspondence from FSSA to the Johnsons that showed the report of zero income earned. The FSSA letters also informed the Johnsons that they needed to report any changes in income or family status.

Charges remain pending at the time of this report.

Dated this 29th day of December, 2006.



David O. Thomas, Inspector General