



# INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

David Cook, Inspector General

OFFICE: INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES (DCS)

TITLE: DCS FAMILY CASE MANAGER BENEFITS FRAUD

CASE ID: 2019-11-0295

DATE: May 26, 2021

*Indiana Office of Inspector General Staff Attorney Lyubov Gore, after an investigation by Inspector General Director of Investigations Darrell Boehmer and Inspector General Special Agent Mike Lepper, reports as follows:*

The Indiana General Assembly charged the Office of the Indiana Inspector General (OIG) with addressing fraud, waste, abuse and wrongdoing in the executive branch agencies of state government. Ind. Code §4-2-7-2(b). The OIG also investigates allegations of criminal activity and Code of Ethics (Code) violations within state government. Ind. Code §4-2-7-3.

## **I. Complaint and Background**

On November 22, 2019, the OIG received a complaint alleging that a former DCS Family Case Manager (FCM), Kiara Johnson, had forged letters regarding her employment status with DCS in order to obtain housing assistance from the Noblesville Housing Authority (NHA) on at least two occasions: April 29, 2019, and November 13, 2019. According to the complaint, in the letters, Johnson used DCS letterhead, represented that the letters were from DCS Human Resources (HR) and specified that her employment with DCS had ended on both occasions. DCS

conducted an independent investigation into the matter and terminated Johnson for violations of the DCS Code of Conduct and the State Personnel Department Standardized Discipline Policy.

The OIG opened an investigation into Johnson's potential criminal violations of forgery, welfare fraud and official misconduct.

## **II. OIG Investigation**

OIG Director of Investigations Darrell Boehmer and OIG Special Agent Mike Lepper investigated the matter. Director Boehmer reviewed Johnson's employment records, including her personnel/payroll documentation, her termination documentation and the resignation letters Johnson sent to NHA. Director Boehmer also reviewed Johnson's emails, specifically her correspondence with NHA and her former DCS supervisor regarding her employment status. In the emails, NHA specifically informed Johnson that Johnson's employer needed to submit a letter to NHA regarding any changes in her employment status. Director Boehmer confirmed that Johnson did not have any breaks in employment between April 29, 2019, and November 15, 2019; however, Johnson was on paid Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leave from May 28, 2019, through July 2, 2019.

Director Boehmer interviewed several witnesses, including two NHA employees. During their interview, the NHA employees stated that Johnson was aware that she needed letters from her employer in order for her to obtain NHA benefits. They also communicated that Johnson received approximately \$2,644.00 in housing assistance for the months of June through September 2019 from NHA based on the letters she sent to NHA regarding her unemployed status in April 2019.

Director Boehmer also interviewed Johnson's former DCS supervisors. Director Boehmer confirmed that Johnson went on FMLA leave and did not resign from DCS in May of 2019 as she

had represented in the April letter to NHA. According to her supervisors, Johnson also did not resign from DCS in November of 2019 as she had represented in her letter to NHA. The supervisors informed Director Boehmer that Johnson did not have approval to send letters regarding her employment status to NHA on DCS letterhead and purporting to be from DCS HR.

During the course of his investigation, Director Boehmer communicated with the Chief of Investigations at the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), Wendell Hoskins. Investigator Hoskins informed Director Boehmer that Johnson had submitted an application for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits on May 22, 2019, and Johnson listed her total gross income as zero dollars on the application. The application included a letter that purported to be from DCS and listed Johnson's last day of employment as May 24, 2019. The documentation Investigator Hoskins forwarded to Director Boehmer showed that, based on Johnson's false SNAP application, Johnson received approximately \$1,878.00 in SNAP benefits.

Special Agent Lepper interviewed Johnson in the presence of her attorney. During the interview, Johnson admitted that she sent the April 29, 2019, letter to NHA regarding leaving her DCS employment and provided a number of reasons for why she sent the letter while remaining employed with DCS. Johnson also confirmed that she was on FMLA leave during the next several months but could not remember the dates. Johnson acknowledged that NHA required her to repay the housing assistance that she had obtained. Special Agent Lepper confirmed that Johnson sent two letters on DCS letterhead, misrepresenting her employment status in order to obtain housing assistance from NHA.

### **III. FSSA Investigation**

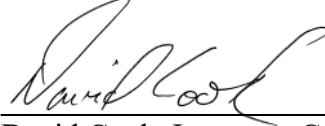
After receiving the inquiry from Director Boehmer, FSSA conducted an independent investigation into Johnson's receipt of SNAP benefits based on the false SNAP application she had submitted to FSSA. FSSA investigators attempted to interview Johnson regarding the SNAP application, but Johnson did not attend the scheduled interview. Special Agent Lepper communicated with FSSA and confirmed that the documentation showed a total loss to FSSA of \$1,878.00 in SNAP benefits stemming from Johnson's false SNAP application.

### **III. Conclusion**

The OIG submitted the results of the OIG's and FSSA's investigation to the Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office. On May 25, 2021, the Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office charged Johnson with Forgery, as a Level 6 felony under Ind. Code §35-43-5-2(d)(4); Counterfeiting, as a Level 6 felony under Ind. Code §35-43-5-2(a)(1)(D); four counts of Welfare Fraud, as Level 6 felonies under Ind. Code §35-43-5-7(a)(1) and Ind. Code §35-43-5-7(b)(1); and Official Misconduct, as a Level 6 felony under Ind. Code §35-44.1-1-1(1). Accordingly, this investigation is closed.

Dated: May 26, 2021

APPROVED BY:



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David Cook, Inspector General