



PRELIMINARY INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT

2005-06-0303

December 29, 2006

MARION COUNTY PUBLIC ASSISTANCE FRAUD - 2

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 Beatrice Collins, 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, Beatrice Collins is a friend of Harper and Russell and received public assistance from July of 1999 through July of 2005, reporting to FSSA during this time that she earning zero income. However, Collins has been employed by the Lawrence Township School Corporation as a bus driver since August of 2001, earning \$25,000 a year.

On various occasions, Collins also received an “auxiliary” payment in addition to her regular monthly payment. Auxiliary payments are given only when there is a change in circumstances, such as the birth of a child. The investigation revealed no change of circumstance that would warrant an auxiliary payment.

Collins was interviewed by FSSA investigators Julie Milks and Robert Kelley on October 25, 2005. Collins stated that Harper had been her caseworker even since she began receiving public assistance. Collins also stated that she would buy food stamps from Stephanie Russell. Collins further stated that she would give co-workers Russell’s telephone number so that they could obtain food stamps from Russell.

Charges remain pending at the time of this report.

Dated this 29th day of December, 2006.



David O. Thomas, Inspector General