



## PRELIMINARY INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT

2005-06-0303

December 29, 2006

### MARION COUNTY PUBLIC ASSISTANCE FRAUD - 3

*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 Sharan 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, one of the individuals who received an unauthorized EBT card from Harper is Sharan Collins. Sharan Collins received \$11,159 in public assistance from November of 2001 through September of 2005. She was single with no dependents until her daughter was born in April of 2005. Collins was on ABAWD status, meaning that she was required to work. However, Harper never coded Collins in the system as being ABAWD. Furthermore, Collins was employed at MSD Lawrence Township from the third quarter of 2001 through the second quarter of 2002. This income was never budgeted into Collins' food stamp case and Collins never reported this income even though Collins received mailings from FSSA informing her that she needed to report any changes in income or family status. Calculations indicate that Collins will owe approximately \$8,644 back to the state.

Charges remain pending at the time of this report.

Dated this 29<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2006.



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David O. Thomas, Inspector General