



PRELIMINARY INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT

2005-06-0303

December 29, 2006

MARION COUNTY PUBLIC ASSISTANCE FRAUD - 7

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 Larry Hart, 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, Larry Hart is FSSA caseworker Geraldine Harper's brother. On June 15, 2005, Harper was interviewed at her home by OIG Special Agent Alan McElroy. Harper stated that she had allowed her brother, Hart, to use fraudulent EBT cards. FSSA records indicate that four fraudulent EBT cards were mailed to Hart's residence. The cards bore fictitious names and the name of Hart's roommate. Hart's home was searched pursuant to a search warrant on June 15, 2005, and officers found these corroborating documents mailed from FSSA to Hart's residence in fictitious clients' names.

Evidence of Hart's unauthorized control over an EBT card provided to him by Harper was also revealed in an email from Harper to her friend, Yvette Dennis. In this email, Harper tells Dennis that her brother, Hart, needs the card because he is starving. Harper states that Hart would pick up the card from Dennis at her office.

Charges remain pending at the time of this report.

Dated this 29th day of December, 2006.



David O. Thomas, Inspector General