



PRELIMINARY INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT

2005-06-0303

December 29, 2006

MARION COUNTY PUBLIC ASSISTANCE FRAUD - 8

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 Jennie 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, Jennie Collins is Stephanie Russell's landlord. Russell was interviewed on June 23, 2005 by OIG Special Agent Alan McElroy. In this interview, Russell stated that she was selling food stamps to her landlord, Jennie Collins, on a regular basis. Russell also stated that she was selling Collins three or four EBT cards a month, and Collins in turn sold these cards for cash.

On June 15, 2005, a search warrant was executed at the home of Stephanie Russell. Officers found a notebook among Russell's possessions in which she maintained a record of the fraudulent EBT cards that she sold. Jennie Collins was identified on the list by her phone number. Russell placed the initials "JC" on the cards that she sold to Collins. In a second statement given February 13, 2006, Russell again stated that she sold EBT cards to Collins.

Charges remain pending at the time of this report.

Dated this 29th day of December, 2006.



David O. Thomas, Inspector General