

Charles J. Hynes
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**KINGS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY CHARLES J. HYNES, NYC
DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATION COMMISSIONER ROSE GILL
HEARN, AND NYC HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION
COMMISSIONER ROBERT DOAR ANNOUNCE THE ARRESTS OF AN
HRA CASEWORKER AND THREE ACCOMPLICES IN THE THEFT OF
123 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE CHECKS, WORTH NEARLY \$90,000,
FROM HRA**

*CASEWORKER CAUSED CHECKS TO BE ISSUED TO ACCOMPLICES WHO
FALSELY POSED AS LANDLORDS CLAIMING RENT FOR
HRA CLIENTS*

Brooklyn, October 25, 2013 - Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes, New York City Department of Investigation (DOI) Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn, and New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) Commissioner Robert Doar today announced the arrests of an HRA caseworker and three accomplices who schemed to steal 123 Emergency Assistance checks worth nearly \$90,000 from HRA. Defendants Elizabeth Valentine, 41, James Whittaker, 43, James Baines, 44, and Howard Green, 47, were arrested this week. Defendants Valentine, Whittaker and Green were arraigned today and released on their own recognizance. Defendant Baines is awaiting arraignment.

District Attorney Hynes said, "The main defendant in this case abused her position as a social services caseworker to steal public funds intended to prevent qualified, low-income New Yorkers from being evicted from their homes. We are committed, along with our partners at DOI and HRA, to uncover and hold accountable government workers such as defendant Valentine, who defraud those in need and, in doing so, ultimately defraud the public's trust. I thank DOI and HRA for bringing this case to our attention and for their cooperation in conducting an investigation into the defendants' crimes."

"An HRA insider and her co-defendants are charged with using deception and forgery to steal tens of thousands of dollars in public funds intended for emergency housing aid," said DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn. "But an alert HRA manager reported discrepancies to DOI, allowing our investigators to uncover and shut down the scheme, and refer it for criminal

prosecution. DOI, along with its partners at HRA and the Kings County District Attorney's Office, will continue to expose and stop the theft of public benefits.”

“HRA brought this matter to the attention of the New York City Department of Investigation and has fully participated in the investigation of this incident,” said HRA Commissioner Robert Doar. “Allegations of staff using their knowledge of our systems, policies and procedures to perpetrate fraud are always troubling and we take them very seriously. Anyone found misusing their position as a public employee for personal gain, should expect to be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Our agency works vigorously to enforce integrity internally and cooperates with all local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. I want to thank DOI’s Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn and Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes and his team for their commitment to investigating and prosecuting fraud against our public assistance programs.”

Valentine worked as a Job Opportunity Specialist at Human Resources Center 66 in Brooklyn, helping applicants obtain public assistance benefits such as emergency funds to pay rent to landlords or other housing expenses. Applicants must provide proof of their eligibility by submitting documentation proving their income, lease, landlord, and the amount of money needed. Part of the defendant’s job was to enter this information into HRA’s computer system.

Between August 4, 2010 and December 4, 2011, Valentine allegedly processed requests for emergency cash assistance for rental arrears and housing expenses using names of existing clients to generate checks for her co-defendants as if they were the landlords of HRA clients. The cases that she used included those of homeless individuals, prior HRA clients with inactive cases and current HRA clients, all of whom had previously applied for s benefits at Center 66. A total of 129 emergency checks were issued, at defendant Valentine’s request, to Whittaker, Baines and Green even though they were not landlords and did not own the properties identified by Valentine in her requests. Valentine has described Whittaker as her boyfriend; Baines and Green are friends of Whittaker. Of the 129 checks issued by Valentine, 123 of those checks, totaling \$89,409, were cashed or deposited. Of those 123 checks, Baines cashed 68 checks totaling \$48,414, Green cashed nine checks totaling \$7,950, and Whittaker cashed 46 checks totaling \$33,045. According to Green’s statement, he turned over the cash from his checks to Whittaker and in return, he received \$150 for each of the nine checks.

Valentine allegedly did not input scanned documents that are usually required to support the requests for assistance, which proves their eligibility. She also failed to enter documentation verifying that she met with clients, and, in some instances, she submitted falsified property documents.

Of the 1,165 counts contained in two separate criminal complaints that were filed today, Valentine is charged with one count of Grand Larceny in the Second Degree, one count of Defrauding the Government, 258 counts of Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, 258 counts of Tampering with Public Records in the First Degree, 129 counts of Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, 259 counts of Official Misconduct, one count of Grand Larceny in the Second Degree, and 130 counts of Violation of Social Services Law Section 145. Defendants Whittaker, Baines and Green are charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree and a Violation of Social Services Law Section 145. In addition, Whittaker is charged with 46 counts of Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Fifth Degree; Baines is charged with 68

counts of Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Fifth Degree; and Green is charged with nine counts of Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Fifth Degree. All three men are also charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree. If convicted of the top count, Valentine faces a maximum of 3-15 years in prison, along with court-ordered restitution of the funds that were stolen from HRA. Whittaker, Baines, and Green face a maximum of 2 1/3 -7 years in prison, along with court-ordered restitution of the funds that they stole from HRA.

The case was investigated by Department of Investigations Special Assistant to the Commissioner Robyn Pullio, Department of Investigations Inspector General Michelle Offsey-Raimondi, Department of Investigations Special Investigator Martha Chatterjee, Department of Investigations Deputy Inspector General Joseph Caputo, and Detective Raysa Galvez. KCDA Detective Investigator Michael Caruso, under the supervision of Supervising Detective Investigator Glenn Kenny, conducted additional investigation.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Heidi Bausk and Ugoeze Ukomadu, from KCDA's Healthcare Fraud Division. The case was supervised by Senior Investigative Attorney Sean Courtney. Lauren Mack is the Chief of the Healthcare Fraud Division.

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