



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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HRA "ELIGIBILITY" SPECIALISTS ARRESTED IN \$10,000 THEFT OF WELFARE RECIPIENTS' BENEFITS

FRIDAY, MAY 21, 1999 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), and Bronx District Attorney ROBERT T. JOHNSON today announced the felony arrest of DWAYNE BROWN, an eligibility specialist assigned to the Human Resources Administration's (HRA) Concourse Job Center in the Bronx, for stealing more than \$10,000 in welfare benefits by issuing fraudulent payments to 11 public assistance recipients who were then asked to give most of the money back to BROWN, and by also diverting certain other benefit payments to himself. A second eligibility specialist, LESLY JEAN, was arrested for his participation in the scheme.

Commissioner Kuriansky explained that an eligibility specialist is responsible not only for determining and verifying a recipient's initial and continuing eligibility for public assistance, but for recommending appropriate changes in a recipient's assistance and/or budget. Eligibility is based, in part, on face-to-face interviews between the recipient and the eligibility specialist.

DOI initiated an investigation in March, after a welfare recipient complained that DWAYNE BROWN, her eligibility specialist, had informed her that he had mistakenly issued her a single-issuance "furniture grant" payment of more than \$900, and that she should redeem this benefit and return the full amount to him in cash. DOI's investigation determined that BROWN had not made an inadvertent error, but rather had falsified public assistance documents to make it appear that the recipient was eligible for the benefit. The following day, the cooperating recipient, wearing a concealed recording device, met with BROWN, who solicited and received, in cash, \$800 of the furniture benefit.

Further investigation revealed that BROWN had solicited 10 other welfare recipients to return single-issuance furniture payments that he had fraudulently placed in their accounts. In most instances, BROWN would inform the recipient that the benefit had been issued either by mistake or through computer error, and that the recipient should redeem the benefit and turn the cash over to him. In other instances, BROWN would contact the recipient and ask the recipient do him a "favor" by retrieving the benefit and returning the money to him.

It is alleged that BROWN himself received more than \$6,400 of the \$9,400 in fraudulent public assistance benefits that were issued to the 11 recipients between December 15, 1998, and March 8, 1999.

Commissioner Kuriansky noted that the remaining funds were kept by the recipients, who either failed or refused to return the money to BROWN, and that none of the recipients had ever actually requested a furniture grant payment.

In addition, BROWN allegedly stole nearly \$1,000 in legitimate public assistance payments issued to two of

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the recipients. In one instance, **BROWN** stole more than \$380 from a recipient by improperly requiring her to return her "pregnancy allowance" payment to him. **BROWN** also stole over \$550 from a second recipient who had been issued a payment as a result of a Fair Hearing decision. Because this recipient had failed to turn over a previous fraudulent furniture payment that **BROWN** had issued to her, **BROWN** canceled her public assistance identification card and fraudulently issued a second furniture grant in her name. **BROWN** then retrieved this benefit with the assistance of an "imposter," posing as the recipient, whom he supplied with a new I.D.card. Unbeknownst to **BROWN**, both the recipient and imposter were cooperating with DOI.

LESLY JEAN, an eligibility specialist also assigned to the Concourse Job Center, located at 1790 Grand Concourse, was charged with participating in **BROWN**'s scheme by falsifying documents in order to facilitate the issuance of the fraudulent single issuance furniture grants.

BROWN, 30, of 2569 Seventh Avenue in Manhattan, has been employed by HRA as an Eligibility Specialist since June 1993, and is assigned to the Concourse Job Center, earning \$27,308 per year. He has been suspended without pay. **BROWN** was charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, and Defrauding the Government. If convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

LESLY JEAN, 39, of 129-35 135th Place in Jamaica, Queens, has been employed by HRA as an Eligibility Specialist since October 14, 1997, and is assigned to the Concourse Job Center, earning \$27,308 per year. He has been suspended without pay. **JEAN** was charged with Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, a Class E felony punishable by up to 4 years in prison.

The investigation was conducted by Gerard Hoey, DOI's Inspector General for HRA, and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspector General Benjamin Defibaugh and Confidential Investigator Mauricio Kasianko.

The Office of Bronx County District Attorney Robert T. Johnson is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney David Hoovler, under the supervision of Richard Baker, Chief of the District Attorney's Arson and Economic Crimes Unit, is handling the matter.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
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