



# Department of Investigation

## *Press Release*

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### **SUBWAY CONDUCTOR'S WIFE, HRA CASEWORKER'S MOM, & N Y POST CLERK CHARGED IN \$146K HOUSING AND WELFARE FRAUD**

EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced that 3 people--a transit conductor's wife, a welfare caseworker's mother, and a data entry clerk at the New York Post--have been charged with stealing a total of over \$146,000 in government benefits. The investigation focused on people who lied about their employment and household income and thereby fraudulently received over \$78,000 in subsidized housing and nearly \$68,000 in public assistance from New York City.

The subway conductor's wife is charged with stealing a total of \$90,021--\$22,404 in rent subsidies and \$67,617 in welfare benefits--by concealing the presence in her household of her husband, who is also a Staten Island home owner. The caseworker's mother is charged with stealing a total of \$49,424 in rent subsidies by hiding the presence in her household of her son, who was previously charged in the same scheme. The clerk is charged with stealing a total of \$6,765 in rent subsidies by failing to disclose her employment and income as a New York Post keyboard operator.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, "These arrests are part of an ongoing citywide investigation by DOI and the local district attorneys, which has, since 1995, resulted in the arrest of 204 tenants--including 69 City, State, or Federal employees--charged with stealing over \$4.1 million in rent subsidy and welfare benefits by concealing their income and assets from the City. To date, 154 cases have resulted in conviction and nearly \$2 million in court-imposed restitution."

Commissioner Kuriansky added, "The lesson these defendants and others would be wise to learn is that, with so many needy New Yorkers on long waiting lists for affordable public housing, the City will not be duped into providing subsidized apartments to people who can well afford to pay more or even live elsewhere."

NYCHA manages 346 public housing developments providing shelter to over 535,000 tenants. In addition, NYCHA administers the Section 8 program, a federally-funded, leased-housing program which provides government rent subsidies to nearly 75,000 needy families living in privately-owned dwellings.

The 3 defendants charged today are accused of stealing from NYCHA, between January 1990 and August 1998, a total of \$78,593--in amounts ranging from \$6,765 to \$49,424--in public housing rent subsidy benefits by concealing their employment or their actual household income. In addition, the transit conductor's wife, who lives in the Stapleton Houses in Stapleton, Staten Island, is also charged with stealing from the City Human Resources Administration (HRA), between June 1982 and December 1998, a total of \$67,617 in public assistance by concealing her husband's employment and income. The caseworker's mother lives in the Grant Houses in Harlem, and the clerk lives in the Wise Towers on Manhattan's upper West Side.

The subway conductor's wife, MONICA WILSON, a tenant residing in a 5-room apartment in the Stapleton Houses at 29 Warren Street in Stapleton, was charged with concealing from NYCHA, between June 1993 and December 1996, the presence in the household of her husband; the \$35,760 a year income he earned as a New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA) subway conductor; and his purchase, in February 1997 for \$133,845, of a 1-family house at 260 Westervelt Avenue in New Brighton, Staten Island--thereby illegally receiving \$22,404 in rent subsidies for that period. WILSON had claimed that her household consisted solely of herself and her 3 children; that her total household income was only \$7,426 a year; and that it was wholly derived from public assistance benefits. Between 1993 and 1996, WILSON's rent share was \$153 a month, while NYCHA paid rent subsidies of \$466 a month; in fact, WILSON should have paid a rent share of \$619 a month. It is also alleged that, from June 1992 to December 1998, WILSON failed to report to HRA her husband's presence in the household, and his income, thereby illegally obtaining \$67,617 in welfare benefits.

The welfare caseworker's mother, BERNINA LEMONNIER, a tenant residing in a 5-room apartment in the Grant Houses in Harlem, was charged with concealing from NYCHA, between 1990 and 1998, the presence in the household of her son, as well as the \$273,283 in income which he earned as a caseworker at HRA's Adult Protective Services office in Brooklyn, thereby illegally obtaining \$49,424 in rent subsidies during that period. LEMONNIER had claimed that her total household income ranged from \$4,096 to \$5,832 a year, and that it was wholly derived from Supplemental Security Income. Between 1990 and 1998, LEMONNIER's rent share ranged from \$63 to \$243 a month, while NYCHA paid rent subsidies ranging from \$376 to \$556 a month. In fact, LEMONNIER should have paid a rent share of \$619 a month. Previously, in June 2000, her son, GERARD LEMONNIER, JR., 46, was similarly charged with concealing from NYCHA, between 1990 and 1998, his presence in the same household, his HRA employment, and his income, thereby also improperly receiving \$49,424 in rent subsidies during that period.

The clerk, NILDA VELASQUEZ, a tenant residing in a 4-room apartment in the Wise Towers at 120 West 91st Street on Manhattan's upper West Side, was charged with concealing from NYCHA, between February 1996 and August 1998, the income she received from the New York Post at 1211 Avenue of the Americas in Manhattan, where she worked as a data entry clerk, thereby illegally receiving \$6,765 in rent subsidies during that period. VELASQUEZ had claimed that her total household income ranged from \$11,180 to \$12,600 a year, while her employer's payroll records indicated that VELASQUEZ had actually earned income ranging from \$29,997 to \$30,893 a year. Between 1996 and 1998, VELASQUEZ's rent share ranged from \$265 to \$303 a month, while NYCHA paid rent subsidies ranging from \$199 to \$237 a month. In fact, VELASQUEZ should have paid a rent share of \$502 a month.

All 3 defendants have been charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a Class D felony, and, in addition, WILSON has been charged with Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, also a Class D felony. If convicted, each faces up to 7 years in prison.

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to NYCHA, to Assistant Deputy Administrator Peter Jenik and Investigator Lisa Luccarelli, of HRA's Bureau of Fraud Investigation, and to the New York Post for their cooperation and assistance in the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner and NYCHA Inspector General Steven A. Pasichow and members of his staff, including Confidential Investigators Bergia Telesford, Michael Wilk, and Jessica Ross.

The Office of Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the cases. Assistant District Attorneys Lynn Kaseta, Miguel Toruno, and Tracee Plowell, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Gary T. Fishman, Chief of the DA's Welfare Fraud Unit, are handling the

matters.

**DEFENDANT INFORMATION**

1. Monica Wilson, 33, of Staten Island (\$22,404 in rent subsidies; \$67,617 in welfare benefits).
2. Bernina Lemonnier, 75, of Manhattan (\$49,424 in rent subsidies).
3. Nilda Velasquez, 50, of Manhattan (\$6,765 in rent subsidies).