



# Department of Investigation

## *Press Release*

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### **EX-WEP WORKER ARRESTED FOR THEFT OF HPD SHELTER CHECKS** *-- Stole & Cashed Over \$1,100 In Relocation Checks --*

EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of JOSE RIVERA, a former New York City Work Experience Program (WEP) worker assigned to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development's (HPD) relocation unit in lower Manhattan, for stealing 3 HPD Relocation Shelter Account checks, totaling \$1,175, and then unlawfully cashing them.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, HPD last year issued 412 relocation shelter checks, totaling \$113,935, to aid New York City residents who lost their residences in fires and other emergencies.

Commissioner Kuriansky said the investigation began in January 2001, when HPD notified DOI that 3 Relocation Shelter Account recipients had reported that they had not received their relocation checks. The recipients had been displaced from their respective residences in separate fires in July, August, and September 2000.

The investigation disclosed that RIVERA, who was assigned to HPD's relocation unit at 100 Gold Street in lower Manhattan and was responsible for mailing out relocation shelter checks, had apparently taken 3 of the checks and cashed them, instead of sending them to their intended recipients--a 55-year-old Brooklyn man, a 29-year-old Brooklyn woman, and a 25-year-old Bronx woman.

The investigation further revealed that RIVERA'S time sheet signatures were similar to the signatures on the 3 cancelled checks--a \$275 check cashed on October 20, 2000, at the HSBC Bank branch at 140 Broadway in lower Manhattan; a \$550 check cashed on November 6, 2000, at the same bank branch; and a \$350 check cashed on December 18, 2000, at the Hudson United Bank in Mahwah, New Jersey. A subsequent analysis of the 3 recipients' actual signatures, the signatures on the 3 cancelled shelter checks, and RIVERA'S HPD time sheet signatures indicated that RIVERA had, in fact, endorsed the 3 stolen HPD checks, using the names of the 3 recipients who had been named as payees on the checks.

RIVERA, 36, of 505 Lincoln Place in Brooklyn, who is not currently employed, was charged with Forgery in the Second Degree and Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, both Class D felonies, and Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree, a Class E felony. If convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to HPD Commissioner Jerilyn Perine, and members of her staff, for their assistance and cooperation in the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by Brian Foley, DOI 's Inspector General for HPD, and members of his staff, including Confidential Investigator Maria Horvat.

The Office of Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney Douglas Kaufman is handling the matter.