



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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HHC EMPLOYEE ARRESTED FOR DEPOSITING STOLEN CHECK ***-- Pension loan check over \$10,000 deposited into Municipal Credit Union Account --***

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), announced today the felony arrest of MERNA WHITAKER, a Health and Hospitals Corporation ("HHC") employee, for depositing a stolen New York City Employees' Retirement System ("NYCERS") check at a Manhattan bank. The check was valued at \$12,395.00.

WHITAKER, 39, of 668 Riverside Drive in Manhattan, was arrested this morning at her home. An HHC employee assigned to Bellevue Hospital since 1995, Whitaker has been charged with violating Title 18 United States Code subsection 371, conspiracy to commit bank fraud. If convicted, she faces up to five years in federal prison.

The investigation began in April 2002 after a NYCERS representative told DOI that Whitaker had illegally deposited a stolen NYCERS loan check on April 2, said Gill Hearn.

Whitaker had deposited the check into her MCU account, but failed to provide the proper identification, according to the complaint. Whitaker repeatedly told the bank she would return with the proper signatures and identification so they could credit the \$12,395 to her account. When she didn't return, the bank reversed the transaction on April 5, 2002. On April 9, NYCERS learned the check had never been received by the payee. Whitaker told investigators an acquaintance asked her to deposit the check in exchange for \$2,500.

"Merna Whitaker tried to take money from a fellow city employee -- that kind of behavior is reprehensible," said Gill Hearn. "And it won't be tolerated in any way, shape or form."

Commissioner Gill Hearn expressed her sincere appreciation to the staff of NYCERS, particularly Karen Mazza, General Counsel, and the staff of the Municipal Credit Union for their assistance during the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by Julia Davis, DOI's Inspector General for Executive Offices & Non-Mayoral Agencies, Assistant Inspector General Michael Healy, and Confidential Investigator Jared Feirstein, with the assistance of the United States Postal Inspection Service, particularly Postal Inspector Thomas M. Gormley, and the office of Barry Friedman, Inspector General for the Health and Hospitals Corporation.

The United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, is prosecuting the case. Assistant United States Attorney David Jaffe is in charge of the prosecution.

Criminal complaints are merely an accusation. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.