



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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Release # 45-2004
nyc.gov/html/doi

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY AUGUST 20, 2004

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BOOKKEEPER USED ALIAS TO GET MORE THAN \$75,000 IN GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES
-- Allegedly defrauded the Social Security Administration and New York City Housing Authority--

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), and ED RYAN, Special Agent in Charge of the Office of the Inspector General of the New York Office of the Social Security Administration (SSA), announced today the arrest of a Bronx bookkeeper who used an alias to conceal her income so that she could receive more than \$75,000 in unwarranted Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and Section 8 housing benefits.

JOANN ZERILLO, 55 of the Bronx, has been charged with Embezzlement and Theft of Public Money, and Fraud and False Statements. If convicted, she faces up to 10 years in jail.

DOI's investigation began after the agency received an anonymous tip indicating that ZERILLO had not accurately reported her income or the household make-up in her two-bedroom apartment, located in a three-family home in the Bronx. Investigators determined that, from January 1997 until August 2004, ZERILLO claimed she could not work because she was incapacitated by asthma; and that she filed for and received approximately \$41,683 in SSI benefits. However, investigators determined that ZERILLO -- using the last name RIZZO and a different Social Security Number -- worked as a bookkeeper at a Westchester company. In that capacity, she earned anywhere from \$27,000 to \$30,000 a year.

In addition, from about January 2001 until August 2004, ZERILLO allegedly submitted false affidavits of income to NYCHA in order to receive more than \$33,000 in Section 8 housing benefits that substantially reduced her rent. ZERILLO received subsidies ranging from \$653/month to \$931/month to apply toward her rent. With those subsidies, ZERILLO's portion of the rent ranged from \$132/month to \$38/month. Furthermore, ZERILLO failed to report to NYCHA her son's presence in the household as well as his income. ZERILLO's housing subsidies would have been significantly less or eliminated if she had accurately reported her household income and make-up.

Commissioner Gill Hearn said, "In her greedy scheme to defraud the government so she could receive unwarranted housing and SSI benefits, this defendant may have delayed or prevented financial aid to others with greater needs. DOI will continue to investigate and refer for prosecution cases that deprive housing and SSI benefits to other eligible applicants."

The investigation was conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner and NYCHA Inspector General Steven A. Pasichow and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspector General Kevin Smith, and Confidential Investigator Alexandra Hampton. Special Agent Tonya Perkins of the Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General participated in the investigation. Assistant United States Attorney Maria Douvas of the office of David N. Kelley, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, will prosecute.

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

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To report someone ripping off the city, call 311 or DOI directly at (212) 825-5959.