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Long Island Woman Indicted for Stealing \$135,000 from New York City's Retirement System

Defendant Allegedly Impersonated Cousin to Claim Death Benefit

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez, together with New York City Department of Investigation Commissioner Jocelyn E. Strauber, today announced that a Long Island woman has been indicted for stealing \$135,178 in ordinary death benefits from the New York City Employees' Retirement System (NYCERS). As part of the theft, the defendant is alleged to have impersonated a cousin who was the rightful beneficiary of the benefit following the death of the cousin's father, a New York City transit worker.

District Attorney Gonzalez said, "This defendant allegedly attempted to defraud New York's retirement system by impersonating a relative and claiming benefits to which she was not entitled. I would like to thank Department of Investigation and my prosecutors for all the work they did to bring this defendant to justice."

Commissioner Strauber said, "As charged in the indictment, this defendant impersonated her own cousin, including through the use of fraudulent documents, to obtain a \$135,000 death benefit. In so doing, she stole from her cousin, the legal beneficiary, and from the New York City Employees' Retirement System (NYCERS). I thank NYCERS for promptly alerting DOI so that we could uncover this alleged scheme, and the dedicated prosecutors at the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office for their partnership in holding accountable those who improperly enrich themselves with City funds at the expense of legitimate beneficiaries."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Akosua Agyeman, 48 of Oceanside, New York. She was arraigned today before Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice Jill Konviser on an indictment in which she is charged with second-degree grand larceny, first-degree identity theft, first-degree offering a false instrument for filing, and first-degree falsifying business records. She was released without bail and ordered to return to court on June 29, 2022.

The District Attorney said that, according to the investigation, beginning in December 2017, the defendant allegedly made a series of fraudulent filings with NYCERS in which she purported to be the daughter of Kwaku Duah, a longtime employee of the New York City Transit Authority who died on November 18, 2017. Duah had previously designated his daughter – the defendant's cousin – as the beneficiary of the ordinary death benefit that is paid when a member of NYCERS dies before retiring. Duah's daughter, the rightful beneficiary, changed her name prior to being designated as Duah's beneficiary. This allegedly allowed the defendant to impersonate her cousin to obtain the death benefit. The filings the defendant submitted to NYCERS are alleged to include a Ghanaian passport; a birth certificate, which was invalid for not reflecting the amended name; and an IRS taxpayer identification number in the cousin's name. Furthermore, according to the investigation, on May 1, 2020, NYCERS mailed a check in the amount of

\$135,178 to the defendant's address in Oceanside. The defendant is alleged to have then deposited the check at a Bethpage Federal Credit Union bank account. Investigators from the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office and the Department of Investigation later determined the defendant opened the account using a fake Delaware driver's license. Additionally, the defendant is alleged to have visited the NYCERS customer service center in Brooklyn on December 1, 2017, where she submitted an invalid copy of her cousin's birth certificate while inquiring about the process of receiving Duah's death benefit.

The case was investigated by Department of Investigation Special Investigator Shakina Griffith-Mercado, under the supervision of Deputy Inspector General David Jordan and Inspector General Ann Petterson.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Adam Libove, Deputy Chief of the District Attorney's Public Integrity Bureau, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Laura Neubauer, Bureau Chief, Assistant District Attorney Michel Spanakos, Deputy Chief of the District Attorney's Investigations Division, and the overall supervision of Assistant District Attorney Patricia McNeill, Chief of Investigations.

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An indictment is an accusatory instrument and not proof of a defendant's guilt.