U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

CANDIDATE FOR NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE PLEADS GUILTY TO WIRE FRAUD

Angela Aquino Attempted to Defraud the New York City Campaign Finance Board of $1 Million in Public Matching Funds

Earlier today in federal court in Brooklyn, Angela Aquino, a 2025 candidate for New York City Public Advocate, pleaded guilty to wire fraud in connection with her scheme to defraud New York City's campaign finance system to obtain public matching funds. The proceeding was held before United States Magistrate Judge Vera Scanlon. When sentenced, Aquino faces a sentence of up to 20 years in prison.

Joseph Nocella, Jr., United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; Nadia I. Shihata, Commissioner, New York City Department of Investigation (DOI); and James C. Barnacle, Jr., Assistant Director in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), announced the guilty plea.

"The defendant, a former candidate for city office, admitted today that she attempted to defraud New York City of $1 million in public funds," stated United States Attorney Nocella. "Her brazen efforts threaten the integrity of our local democratic processes."

"New Yorkers deserve a baseline of integrity from candidates running for public office, an attribute this defendant – through her actions – demonstrated she clearly lacked," stated DOI Commissioner Shihata. "As a candidate for NYC Public Advocate, this defendant attempted to fraudulently obtain $1 million in public matching funds by obscuring the true source of the funds flowing into her campaign committee's bank account. The defendant also used some of her campaign funds to pay her personal expenses, including rent for her apartment. New York City's Matching Funds Program is supported by taxpayer dollars, and those who seek these funds must follow the law. I thank the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of

New York and the New York Office of the FBI for their partnership in protecting the integrity of our campaign finance system."

"Angela Aquino's attempt to defraud the City of New York is disgraceful and unacceptable. Any theft of taxpayer money will be fully investigated and prosecuted. In support of the Vice President's Fraud Task Force, FBI New York will continue to work diligently to protect the public from fraud in all forms," stated FBI Assistant Director in Charge Barnacle.

New York City's Matching Funds Program

The New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB) offers a voluntary public-financing program matching small-dollar contributions from New York City residents to candidates for city office. To be eligible for matching funds, candidates must meet a two-part fundraising threshold: first, they must collect a minimum number of contributions of $10 or more; and, second, they must raise a minimum amount of qualifying contributions from residents of New York City. To be eligible for the matching funds program, a candidate for Public Advocate must have raised at least $125,000 from at least 500 qualifying contributors. In addition, cash contributions are capped at $100 per contributor for purposes of qualifying for matching funds.

For a candidate to apply cash contributions toward the threshold necessary to become eligible for public matching funds, a candidate's authorized committee was required to submit contribution cards to the CFB that listed, among other information, each contributor's name, residential address, employer, and occupation, as well as the date and amount of contribution. The contribution cards also had to be signed by the contributors.

Candidates were prohibited from giving false information to the CFB. Candidates were also prohibited from using public matching funds for purposes that were illegal, improper, or not in furtherance of the candidate's nomination or election. Violation of these prohibitions would render the candidate ineligible to receive public matching funds.

Once a candidate met the eligibility requirements to join the program, the CFB would provide the campaign with public funds at a matching rate of $8 to $1. In other words, if a candidate raised $125,000 toward the fundraising threshold, the CFB would provide that candidate with $1 million in public matching funds.

The Fraudulent Scheme

Aquino engaged in a scheme to obtain $1 million in public matching funds, knowing that her campaign committee was not entitled to such funds. In particular, she took numerous steps artificially to inflate the deposits into her campaign committee's bank account to make it appear that the committee had met the $125,000 threshold for public funds. In fact, very little of the deposits were eligible contributions from New Yorkers.

In the first months of 2025, Aquino's personal bank account received more than $130,000 that originated from the Philippines. Of this amount, at least $34,000 was a loan to Aquino from a contact there. Aquino, with others, repeatedly withdrew funds from her personal bank account in cash and deposited cash into her campaign committee's bank account. These contributions were then identified to the CFB as contributions from residents of New York City that were eligible for public matching funds. Contribution cards submitted in support of these supposed contributions, which purported to identify the contributors and included their personal identifying information and their signatures, were falsified.

Aquino cycled funds out of, and back into, the campaign committee's bank account, sometimes using bank accounts of friends and associates as intermediary accounts to obscure the true source of the funds. The purpose of cycling the funds in this way was to make the total amount of deposits into the campaign committee's account appear higher, such that the total contributions would appear to meet the CFB's threshold.

Aquino used funds from the campaign committee account to pay for her personal expenses, including the rent for her apartment, while falsely reporting to the CFB that the payments were for legitimate campaign expenses. Aquino also lied to federal agents concerning her relationship with the recipients of some of these expenditures. For example, Aquino told federal agents that her landlords helped with petitions and with campaigning, justifying the campaign's payments to them. In fact, Aquino's landlords had nothing to do with her campaign.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Public Integrity Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Laura Zuckerwise and Sean Sherman are in charge of the prosecution with assistance from Paralegal Specialist Melissa Bennett.

The Defendant:

ANGELA AQUINO
Age: 47
New York, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 26-CR-231 (MKB)