



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

CANDIDATE FOR NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE
CHARGED WITH WIRE FRAUD

Defendant Allegedly Attempted to Defraud the New York City Campaign Finance Board of \$1 Million in Public Matching Funds

Earlier today in federal court in Brooklyn, a criminal complaint was unsealed charging Angela Aquino, a 2025 candidate for New York City Public Advocate, with wire fraud in connection with her scheme to defraud New York City's campaign finance system to obtain public matching funds. Aquino was arrested today and is scheduled to be arraigned this afternoon by United States Magistrate Judge Clay H. Kaminsky.

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

"The defendant, a former candidate for citywide office, allegedly engaged in a months' long brazen scheme to obtain fraudulently \$1 million in public funds, exploiting a matching funds program designed to reduce corruption in the city's campaign finance system," stated United States Attorney Nocella. "Our Office will aggressively hold accountable would-be public officials out to steal taxpayer dollars."

"New Yorkers deserve political candidates who uphold the highest standards of public service, demonstrating their integrity and commitment to the City and its people. Instead, as charged, this defendant allegedly orchestrated a bold scheme to manipulate the public matching funds system in an illegal attempt to unlawfully secure \$1 million for her campaign, none of which she was entitled to receive," stated DOI Commissioner Shihata. "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 rooting out corruption and protecting public funds.”

“Angela Aquino allegedly attempted to steal one million dollars from New York taxpayers by fraudulently inflating her campaign's bank account to receive matching public funds. The FBI continues to hold accountable corrupt political candidates who try to buy the public's support,” 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. The program is available to any candidate running for city office, including Public Advocate. 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 number 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, occupation, and 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. Therefore, 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

As alleged in the complaint, the defendant 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, the defendant took numerous steps to artificially 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, the defendant'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 the defendant from a contact there. The defendant, 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 also 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 also used funds from the campaign committee account to pay for her personal expenses, including the rent for her apartment, falsely reporting to the CFB that the payments were for legitimate campaign expenses. Aquino also lied to federal agents as to 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 charge in the complaint is an allegation, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted of the charge, the defendant faces up to 20 years' imprisonment.

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-MJ- 93