



# NEWS RELEASE

Office of the New York State Welfare Inspector General  
**Catherine Leahy Scott – Acting Welfare Inspector General**

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## NYC SOCIAL SERVICES EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO FEDERAL FRAUD CHARGE FOR \$95,000 FOOD STAMP THEFT SCHEME

NEW YORK CITY – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott today announced the federal guilty plea of a New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) employee who engaged in a variety of schemes over a seven-year period enabling the theft of \$95,000 in government welfare benefits.

Omar Jaata, 43, of the Bronx, pleaded guilty in federal court in Manhattan to a federal felony count of Mail Fraud in full satisfaction of an indictment filed against him. The charge carries a maximum potential penalty of 20 years in prison and \$190,000 fine. As part of the plea, Jaata agreed to forfeit \$95,000 and is expected at sentencing to be ordered to pay full restitution for his thefts.

Jaata, an HRA employee since 2010 and most recently with the title of welfare benefits “Eligibility Specialist,” used a variety of tactics and his access to the city’s welfare benefits systems to create multiple fake applicant accounts. Since late 2014, Jaata issued \$95,000 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP” or food stamps) benefits using these accounts, sending these benefits to addresses that he controlled, including both his own home address and a Post Office Box that he opened. Jaata used these welfare benefits for personal purchases.

“This defendant was entrusted to administer welfare benefits but instead shamelessly and greedily used his position to enrich himself with unfettered access to taxpayer funds,” said **Inspector General Leahy Scott**. “I will continue to use my position and law enforcement partnerships to investigate welfare fraud wherever it occurs and protect public benefits for those who are most in need.”

An investigation by Inspector General Leahy Scott and the FBI found that Jaata, in his position at HRA, was responsible for determining and verifying initial and continuing eligibility for individuals receiving welfare benefits. As part of his duties, Jaata was able to award food stamp benefits to qualified individuals. He was also authorized to award immediate “single issuance” food stamp benefits to individuals who had a documented, urgent need. The investigation found that Jaata abused this authority and for his own financial benefit he created welfare cases for multiple phony applicants, and in addition, authorized emergency food stamp benefits to be issued to those “applicants” at addresses that he controlled. Jaata used his intimate knowledge of the HRA welfare benefits system to carry out his scheme, including overriding the computerized benefits system’s safeguards. Such food stamp benefits accounts are administered through the use of Electronic Benefit Cards (EBT) which Jaata caused to be mailed to addresses he controlled. On numerous occasions, Jaata was observed by investigators on surveillance video spending the money he fraudulently issued. In total, Omar Jaata stole \$95,000 in food stamp benefits which he then used for personal purchases at large wholesale clubs and bodegas in the Bronx and Manhattan.

Omar Jaata pleaded guilty Thursday afternoon in the United States Court of the Southern District of New York in Manhattan. He remained released on \$100,000 bond bail pending sentencing on April 10, 2019.

Inspector General Leahy Scott thanked the FBI for their partnership in the investigation, the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance for their assistance with the investigation, and United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York Geoffrey S. Berman and his office for prosecuting this matter.

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*The New York State Office of the Welfare Inspector General investigates fraud, abuse or illegal acts committed against public assistance programs designed to help those in need. Our office also investigates complaints about the agencies and local social services districts who administer social services programs. Complaints and referrals are kept confidential. We can be reached by calling toll free: 1-800-367-4448, utilizing our online complaint form: <http://www.ig.ny.gov> or sending an email to: [inspector.general@ig.ny.gov](mailto:inspector.general@ig.ny.gov). You also can write to our office at: Office of the Welfare Inspector General, Empire State Plaza, Agency Building 2, 16th Floor Albany, New York 12223*