



NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Inspector General
Catherine Leahy Scott

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 7, 2017
Contact [John Milgrim](#): 518-474-1010

FORMER TOP SUNY BUFFALO ADMINISTRATORS CHARGED WITH MORE THAN \$330,000 THEFT OF STATE FUNDS

*Stolen Funds Used for Personal Trips, Parties, Broadway Shows and
Unapproved Donations to Charities*

*The Two Defendants Will Pay a Total of More Than \$350,000 in Restitution and
Back Taxes*

BUFFALO – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott and Erie County District Attorney John J. Flynn today announced the arrest and guilty pleas of two former top administrators at the State University of New York at Buffalo (“SUNY Buffalo”) for stealing more than \$330,000 in State funds and using the money for fine dining and trips for family and friends, concerts, Broadway shows and unapproved charitable spending later claimed by one of the defendants as personal tax deductions.

Dennis Black, 61, of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina and previously a resident of Buffalo, is the former Vice President of University Life Services at SUNY Buffalo, and was charged and pleaded guilty today in State Supreme Court in Buffalo to Grand Larceny in the Second Degree and Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, both felonies. As a condition of the plea, Black will pay New York State \$320,000 in restitution and will pay \$22,238 in back taxes.

Andrea Costantino, 48, of Depew, the former Director of Campus Living at SUNY Buffalo, pleaded guilty to Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree, a felony. As a condition of the plea, Costantino will pay \$14,664 restitution to New York State.

An investigation by Inspector General Leahy Scott found that Black, who resigned from his role at the University in the summer of 2016 and moved to South Carolina during the pendency of

this investigation, used his position at the university since at least 2007 to steal State money and spend it on personal travel, a social club membership, sporting and entertainment tickets, and to donate to charity in his own name, among other items. Black also took improper personal tax deductions against the stolen funds he gave to charities. The scheme involved his stealing money from an account administered and funded by the Faculty Student Association (“FSA”), a not-for-profit corporation that operates the food services and book stores at SUNY Buffalo. These funds were payments by FSA to SUNY Buffalo that Black improperly steered into this account rather than an official SUNY Buffalo-controlled account, thereby avoiding State financial controls.

In addition, Costantino, who worked for Black as Director of Campus Living and resigned from State service last month, had access to a similar FSA funded account from which she stole \$14,664 for personal expenses since 2013.

“These former top SUNY administrators violated the public trust and the trust of the students they served through a breathtaking and brazen theft of State funds that went on for years,” said **Inspector General Leahy Scott**. “To add insult to injury, defendant Black had the audacity to claim personal tax deductions against the stolen State funds he gave to charities, adding additional ill-gotten gains to his own wallet. I will continue investigating the policies and practices in place at the Buffalo campus, and work closely with SUNY Central Administration in Albany to help ensure such schemes can never be repeated, and I thank District Attorney Flynn and his office for their partnership in bringing this case.”

“Every penny stolen from the state is an affront to every law-abiding taxpayer,” said **District Attorney Flynn**. “Thanks to tremendous cooperation between our Office and the Inspector General, these defendants will be held accountable for their dishonest actions.”

Black’s personal use of the stolen funds included:

- Travel with his wife to Salt Lake City for their son’s wedding, and personal travel to Denver, Florida, Washington D.C., Colorado Springs and Chicago, including airfare, lodging and meals.
- New York Yankees tickets.
- A total of \$34,000 for personal dues and fees for the Buffalo Saturn Club, a social club.
- Tickets to a James Taylor concert, a Liza Minelli concert and Broadway shows.
- Nearly \$11,500 for University Life Services staff parties at Buffalo Bison’s Field.
- More than \$3,300 for tickets to and in support of a performing Arts festival in Charleston, South Carolina, where he had a second home.

Black also used stolen funds for charitable contributions in his own name, and in some instances took corresponding tax deductions to which he was not entitled. His improper charitable spending included:

- Using at least \$75,000 in stolen State funds between 2008-2016 to support the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO), of which he was a former board member. His spending included more than \$18,000 for tickets and dinners for himself and others, \$5,000 for

video and recording services and more than \$15,000 in pledges in the name of himself and his wife.

- Using nearly \$13,500 in stolen funds in 2013 for event tickets and campaign support when he chaired the United Way campaign.
- Donating stolen funds to support the “Barksgiving” campaign in Buffalo, a Thanksgiving event for dogs and their owners, as well as for contributions to the American Heart Association and the Christ the King Seminary.

Costantino’s personal use of the stolen funds included:

- Using more than \$4,200 in state funds to purchase a treadmill for her home, which she charged the equipment to her State credit card.
- Using her State credit card to charge airfare and four nights in a Kissimmee, Florida condominium, asserting it was for a college conference when no such conference was held during her trip.
- Using her State credit card to purchase four \$300 gift cards to Fleet Feet Sports. Costantino indicated the cards were for school sponsorship of a run, but she instead used the cards for personal purchases.
- Using \$8,000 in State funds to make a charitable contribution to an organization affiliated with the Boston Marathon to ensure her entry into the Boston Marathon.
-

Inspector General Leahy Scott’s investigation into the practices and policies at SUNY Buffalo, and in regards to the use of funds intended for student activities, remains ongoing.

Black and Costantino are due to reappear in State Supreme Court in Buffalo at a later date for sentencing.

Inspector General Leahy Scott thanked SUNY Buffalo for their assistance with this investigation, and Erie County District Attorney John J. Flynn and his office for assisting with the investigation and the prosecution of this matter.

###