



NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Inspector General
Catherine Leahy Scott

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FORMER TOP SUNY BUFFALO ADMINISTRATOR SENTENCED TO JAIL AND PAYS RESTITUTION FOR \$320,000 THEFT OF STATE FUNDS

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

BUFFALO – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott and Erie County District Attorney John J. Flynn today announced the sentencing of a former top administrator at the State University of New York at Buffalo (“SUNY Buffalo”) for stealing more than \$320,000 in State funds and using the money for fine dining and trips for family and friends, concerts, Broadway shows and unapproved charitable spending that he later claimed as personal tax deductions.

Dennis Black, 61, of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, the former Vice President of University Life Services at SUNY Buffalo, was sentenced today in State Supreme Court in Buffalo to five years of probation, a fine of \$5000, and 2500 hours of community service for his previous guilty plea to Grand Larceny in the Second Degree and Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, both felonies. He also has paid \$320,000 in restitution, and \$34,302 to the New York State Department of Tax and Finance.

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 the 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.

“This former top SUNY Buffalo official succumbed to hubris and left a brazen series of crimes in his wake,” said **Inspector General Leahy Scott**. “His actions desecrated the integrity of his position and violated the trust of student and the public which he was supposed to serve. I will continue to work closely with SUNY Central Administration in Albany to help ensure such actions are never repeated, and to use all the resources at my disposal to investigate and root out corrupt public employees. I thank District Attorney Flynn and his office for their outstanding partnership throughout this case.”

“This should not be a situation where an individual steals public funds, pays it back and all is forgiven. Mr. Black abused his position of power to steal public dollars,” said **District Attorney Flynn**. “This was not an isolated incident, it went on year after year, charge after charge, trip after trip. He used his well-paid public position to take funds intended for the university and its students, for his own benefit. On top of that he had the

nerve to write off on his taxes the donations he made to charity using the money he stole. As District Attorney it is my position that the sentence should include incarceration.”

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.

In a related matter, Andrea Costantino, 48, of Depew, the former Director of Campus Living at SUNY Buffalo, was sentenced last month to a three-year conditional discharge and 250 hours of community service, and she paid the full \$14,664 in restitution, for her similar thefts of State funds. Costantino, who worked for Black as Director of Campus Living and resigned from State service last summer, had access to a similar FSA funded account from which she stole these funds for personal expenses since 2013.

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

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 for the prosecution of this matter.

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