



NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Inspector General
Catherine Leahy Scott

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FORMER TOP SUNY BUFFALO ADMINISTRATOR SENTENCED FOR THEFT OF STATE FUNDS

BUFFALO – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott today announced the sentencing of a former top administrator at the State University of New York at Buffalo (“SUNY Buffalo”) for stealing more than \$14,000 in State funds and using the money for personal travel and fitness.

Andrea Costantino, 48, of Depew, the former Director of Campus Living at SUNY Buffalo, was sentenced by New York State Supreme Court Justice Hon. John L. Michalski to a three year conditional discharge and 250 hours of community service, and she paid the full \$14,664 in restitution. The sentence is for her September guilty plea to Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree, a felony.

Costantino’s direct supervisor Dennis Black, 61, of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, the former Vice President of University Life Services at SUNY Buffalo, also pleaded guilty in September to the theft of \$320,000 in State funds through a related scheme. He is scheduled next month for sentencing on his plea 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 he will pay \$22,000 in back taxes.

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 and resigned from State service last August, had access to a similar FSA funded account from which she stole approximately \$14,000 for personal expenses since 2013.

“Today’s sentencing closed one chapter of a sordid scheme against taxpayers and required the defendant pay back every penny she stole. Both of these former top administrators selfishly violated the trust of the public and the students they served,” said **Inspector General Leahy Scott**. “My investigation into the policies and practices in place at the SUNY Buffalo campus is continuing, and I am working closely with SUNY Central Administration in Albany to help ensure such schemes can never be repeated. I thank District Attorney Flynn and his office for prosecuting this matter.”

Costantino’s personal use of the stolen funds included:

- Using more than \$4,200 in state funds to purchase a treadmill for her home, charging 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 is due to reappear in State Supreme Court in Buffalo on January 10, 2018 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 for the prosecution of this matter.

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