



NEWS RELEASE

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

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QUEENS WOMAN CHARGED IN THEFT OF NEARLY \$80,000 IN WELFARE BENEFITS WHILE SUPPORTED BY COURT OFFICER'S SIX-FIGURE INCOME

QUEENS - Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott today announced the arrest of a Queens resident on charges that she defrauded the government and stole nearly \$80,000 in Medicaid and food stamp benefits by intentionally concealing that the father of her two children resided in her household and provided financial support to the family with his six-figure income.

Yessenia Gonzalez, 43, of 97-30 Linden Boulevard, Queens, was charged with Welfare Fraud in the Second and Third Degrees, Grand Larceny in the Second and Third Degrees, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree and Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, all felonies.

“This individual supplemented her household’s six-figure income by allegedly stealing public benefits meant to assist New York families who are most in need,” said Inspector General Leahy Scott. “The acts, as charged, gave this defendant an inappropriate and unfair taxpayer-subsidized financial advantage over honest families struggling to make ends meet. I will use the resources of my office to hold accountable and bring to justice anyone who resorts to criminal acts to take advantage of the public benefits system.”

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, whose office is prosecuting the case, said, "The defendant in this case is accused of cheating the system by fraudulently receiving both Medicaid and food stamp benefits. Public assistance is intended to help the disadvantaged and truly needy. Thanks to the diligent actions of investigators, the alleged free ride for this defendant is over."

Inspector General Leahy Scott’s investigation determined that between October 2006 and April 1, 2015, Gonzalez submitted false welfare documentation to the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), failing to disclose, as required, that the father of her children resided with her and provided financial support to the family through his employment as a New York State Court Officer. In addition to his current \$70,000 annual State salary, this individual also owned several income producing properties in Queens and Brooklyn during the time period charged in the fraud. The investigation revealed that in 2013 and 2014 alone, he received \$105,000 in rental income from these properties in addition to his State salary.

As a result of her false filings submitted to HRA, Gonzalez improperly obtained \$78,431 in public benefits as follows: \$49,654 in Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (food stamps) benefits, and \$28,777 in Medicaid benefits.

Gonzalez was arraigned in Queens County Criminal Court and is due to return to court Dec. 15.

Inspector General Leahy Scott thanked HRA Commissioner Steven Banks, and his staff for their assistance with the investigation. Inspector General Leahy Scott also thanked Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown and his staff for prosecuting this case.

The Defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in a court of law.

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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.state.ny.gov> or sending an email to: 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.