



# NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Inspector General  
**Catherine Leahy Scott**

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## **INVESTIGATION FINDS LACK OF SECURITY PROCESSES ENABLED REPEATED THEFTS FROM PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS IN STATE CARE**

*State Office of Mental Health Caseworkers at Hutchings Psychiatric Center Community Residences Stole More Than \$17,800 in Food Stamp Benefits from Residents under Their Care*

*IG Recommendations Adopted Statewide to Protect Assets of Residents in State Care*

ALBANY – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott today released a [report](#) of an investigation into the repeated and prolific thefts of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP” or food stamps) benefits from residents of a community home operated by the New York State Office of Mental Health (“OMH”) in central New York. The investigation found a lack of security processes enabled repeated thefts from residents in OMH’s care, and led to the agency adopting the Inspector General’s recommended reforms on a statewide basis.

The investigation, initiated by allegations of thefts of food stamp benefits from residents of Richard H. Hutchings Psychiatric Center (“Hutchings”) community residences, ultimately uncovered that more than \$17,800 in benefits belonging to nine residents of the facilities was stolen by two OMH employees at the homes. The investigation not only found that OMH, Hutchings and its community residences lacked any written policies regarding the management and use of food stamp benefit cards belonging to the residents, but that the cards and their personal identification numbers were unsecured and accessible to all employees at the residences. Moreover, neither OMH nor Hutchings conducted any audits or otherwise reviewed the usage of food stamp benefit cards belonging to residents in their care.

The lack of policies and procedures for securing the food stamp benefits enabled OMH therapy aides Alphonso Bradshaw and Ethalyn Crowder to steal \$17,837 in benefits from nine residents under their care from early 2012 through early 2014. The thefts included Bradshaw scheming with 13 of his relatives and acquaintances, including the operators of Sabatino’s Pizza and Deli in Syracuse, enabling them to exchange the residents’ food stamp benefits for cash. All involved have since pleaded guilty to various crimes stemming from the thefts.

“Public employees charged with caring for some of New York’s most vulnerable residents were able to exploit a serious lack of safeguards and brazenly steal benefits worth thousands of dollars from individuals under their care,” said Inspector General Leahy Scott. “These heinous crimes emphasized the critical need for meaningful reforms to protect the assets of vulnerable residents in State care and I am gratified OMH has adopted my proposals at the Hutchings facilities, and is implementing them statewide.”

Based on the investigation, Inspector General Leahy Scott found OMH, Hutchings and its community residences lacked any written policies, and possessed woefully deficient practices, regarding the management and security of residents’ food stamp benefit cards making them highly vulnerable to abuse by staff and others.

As a result, Hutchings implemented new procedures to safeguard resident benefit cards including the locked storage of the cards and limiting staff access to them, detailed ledger entries reflecting use of the cards and regular audits of the ledgers and card accounts.

Inspector General Leahy Scott also recommended OMH implement statewide policy regarding the management, use and security of residents' benefit cards in all of its residential facilities, which OMH has done.

An online copy of the report may be obtained by clicking [HERE](#)

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