



# NEWS RELEASE

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

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## **NEW YORK STATE EMPLOYEE AND SPOUSE PLEAD GUILTY AND PAY BACK MORE THAN \$42,000 IN WELFARE FUNDS THEY STOLE**

ALBANY – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott and Kings County Acting District Attorney Eric Gonzalez announced the arrests and guilty pleas of an employee of the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and her spouse who stole from and defrauded the welfare system by more than \$42,000 over three years by intentionally concealing the State employee’s job and salary from welfare officials in applications for Food Stamp and Medicaid benefits.

Dennise James, 52, an employee of OPWDD since August 2012, and her spouse John James, 58, both of East 81<sup>st</sup> Street in Brooklyn, were arrested and charged with Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, and Six Counts of Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, all felonies, and Welfare Fraud in the Fifth Degree, a misdemeanor. Subsequent to their arrest on Monday, December 11, both Dennise and John James pleaded guilty to the charge of Welfare Fraud in the Fifth Degree and paid back the entire amount stolen.

“Through a years-long subterfuge this couple concealed the wife’s public employment to obtain welfare benefits to which they were not otherwise entitled,” said Inspector General Leahy Scott. I will continue to use all the resources of my office to protect these taxpayer funded benefits that are only meant for those with the most financial need.”

An investigation by Inspector General Leahy Scott found that Dennise James worked at OPWDD since August 2012 where she maintained the title of Direct Support Assistant performing patient care for developmentally disabled adults at a residential facility in Brooklyn. Between October 2012 and March 2016, both Dennise and John James falsified numerous welfare applications, recertification documents, renewals, and periodic reports they submitted to the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), intentionally omitting Dennise James’s employment with OPWDD. These falsifications enabled the James family to fraudulently collect \$39,785 in Medicaid benefits, and \$2,972 in Food Stamp benefits during this period. For the full calendar years 2013, 2014 and 2015 alone, Dennise James earned more than \$185,000 in wages from OPWDD that were not reported to HRA.

Both Medicaid and Food Stamps are welfare programs meant only for those qualified individuals who are in need of government financial assistance.

Both Dennise and John James pleaded guilty in Brooklyn Criminal Court before Judge Joseph McCormack. In addition to pleading guilty, the couple paid \$42,757 in full restitution to HRA.

Inspector General Leahy Scott thanked HRA for their assistance with the investigation, and Acting Kings County District Attorney Eric Gonzalez and his office for prosecuting this matter.

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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.ny.gov> or sending an email to: [inspector.general@ig.ny.gov](mailto: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*