



NEWS RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 28, 2017
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BRONX COUPLE CHARGED WITH MORE THAN \$65,000 IN WELFARE AND UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FRAUD BY HIDING HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND FALSIFYING BANK AND EMPLOYMENT RECORDS

NEW YORK CITY – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott announced today the arrests of a Bronx husband and wife who defrauded the welfare and unemployment insurance system by more than \$65,000, by hiding their household income and falsifying bank and employment records.

Lawrence Lettera, 49, and Antoinette Lettera, 50, of Edison Avenue in the Bronx, were each charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Third Degree, and Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, all felonies. Lawrence Lettera was additionally charged with Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, a felony.

“This couple flagrantly manipulated and stole from taxpayer-funded benefit programs to supplement their personal bank accounts,” said Inspector General Leahy Scott. “The food stamps and Medicaid programs are distinctly meant to help only those who are truly in need. I will continue diligently working with my law enforcement partners to pursue anyone who steals from critical public benefit programs.”

An investigation by Inspector General Leahy Scott and the New York State Department of Labor’s Office of Special Investigations found that the husband and wife defrauded both the welfare and unemployment insurance systems through a variety of schemes. By under reporting or failing to disclose their household income from construction supervision and retail jobs at large sporting goods and clothing stores, as well as the unemployment insurance payments they were paid, they were able to obtain \$6,525 in food stamp benefits and \$10,392.91 in Medicaid benefits to which they were not entitled between 2010 and 2013. Separately, through fictitious bank and employment records between 2012 and 2014, the couple received \$48,521 in unemployment insurance benefits to which they were not entitled.

The couple was arraigned in Bronx County Criminal Court and released pending their reappearance in court on December 7, 2017.

Inspector General Leahy Scott thanked the New York State Department of Labor for their partnership in this investigation, and Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark and her office for prosecuting this matter.

The defendants are 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.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