



NEWS RELEASE

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

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BRONX COUPLE PLEADS GUILTY TO 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 guilty pleas 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, of Edison Avenue in the Bronx, pled guilty to two counts of Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, felonies, as part of an agreement in which he will pay back more than \$65,000 in government benefits that were stolen. His wife, Antoinette Lettera, 50, pled guilty to two counts of Welfare Fraud in the Fifth Degree, misdemeanors.

“This couple enriched themselves with the flagrant theft of taxpayer-funded benefits meant only for those who are in the most need of financial assistance,” said **Inspector General Leahy Scott**. “I will use all of the resources at my disposal 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 underreporting 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 received, 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 also not entitled.

The couple pled guilty in Bronx County Criminal Court and both remained released pending their sentencing on June 11, 2018.

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.

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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