



NEWS RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 26, 2018
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BRONX COUPLE SENTENCED FOR 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, Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark and New York State Department of Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon announced today the sentencing of a Bronx husband and wife who defrauded the welfare and unemployment insurance systems 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, was sentenced in Bronx Supreme Court to full restitution and five years of probation for his prior plea to Welfare Fraud in the Third Degree, a felony, 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, 51, pleaded guilty to two counts of Welfare Fraud in the Fifth Degree and was sentenced previously to a conditional discharge.

“This couple falsified and concealed their true income and feigned poverty to enrich themselves with taxpayer-funded benefits to which they were not entitled,” said **Inspector General Leahy Scott**. “The integrity of the welfare benefits system is critical for those living among us who are in dire financial need, and I will continue working with my law enforcement partners to relentlessly pursue criminal opportunists who try to abuse it.”

“We will not tolerate fraud involving funds meant to help members of the community who really do need unemployment insurance, Medicaid and food stamps. These defendants stole \$65,000 from taxpayers and will now pay it back,” said **Bronx District Attorney Clark**. “The Bronx District Attorney’s Office will continue to pursue these fraud cases with the New York State Inspector General.”

“Under Governor Cuomo, New York State has a zero-tolerance policy for the theft of important safety net benefits,” said **New York State Department of Labor Commissioner Reardon**. “This was a complex fraud orchestrated to line the defendants’ pockets with money intended to support New Yorkers in need. Let this case serve as a warning to those who would seek to defraud the UI system: you will be brought to justice.”

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.

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