

**SPECIAL AGENTS AND INVESTIGATORS WITH THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES-
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL INVESTIGATE AND ARREST DCF WORKER
ON MULTIPLE CHARGES; TWO OTHER PEOPLE
ALSO CHARGED IN THEFT SCHEME**

December 7, 2007 – Florida Department of Law Enforcement special agents and investigators and the Department of Children and Families (DCF)-Office of Inspector General (OIG) have charged a DCF employee and two accomplices with allegedly stealing more than \$1.5 million in state funds.

Violet Jones, 41, of Miramar, a DCF supervisor in Plantation, was arrested Dec. 6 and charged with first-degree grand theft over \$100,000, organized scheme to defraud, identity theft, official misconduct, unlawful compensation and money laundering.

Jones is accused of stealing the money from two public assistance accounts by creating and authorizing auxiliary cash benefits for DCF recipient accounts and then withdrawing and/or receiving cash from those two accounts through an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card. Investigators said some of the money allegedly was used to buy a Lexus sports utility vehicle and to make car payments on Lexus sedan. Other funds allegedly were used at gambling establishments in South Florida.

According to authorities, Jones allegedly was able to orchestrate the crimes by using a real case number belonging to a South Florida man and then having that account's EBT card diverted and sent to her Miramar home. Investigators said the South Florida man does not appear to have any connection to the theft scheme.

Shanika Shorter, 25, of Fort Lauderdale, was arrested earlier today and charged with first-degree grand theft over \$100,000, organized scheme to defraud, money laundering and welfare fraud. Investigators alleged that Shorter used the second EBT card to withdraw money from a DCF cash assistance account in Shorter's name and then provide a portion of those funds back to Jones. FDLE investigators are working to determine if Shorter was eligible for any public assistance benefits.

FDLE financial crimes investigators and DCF OIG investigators said the thefts allegedly occurred from January 2005 to December 2007. During that time, an estimated \$1.5 million in state funds reportedly were withdrawn by Jones, Shorter and Shorter's sister, Tanisha Shorter, investigators said.

Tanisha Shorter, 22, of Fort Lauderdale, also was arrested today and charged with first-degree grand theft over \$100,000, organized scheme to defraud, money laundering and welfare fraud.

Shorter's sister, Tanisha Shorter, also is accused of participating in the theft scheme by using her sister's EBT card to withdraw cash from the same cash assistance account. Tanisha Shorter also provided some of those funds back to Jones, authorities said.

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Authorities suspect that Jones allegedly stole various amounts of public assistance funds each week and was able to do so because of her position and access to DCF systems. Investigators said that Jones allegedly authorized monthly combined cash benefits to the two cash assistance accounts ranging from \$900 to \$63,900.

“This was a strongly coordinated effort between FDLE and DCF,” said Commissioner Gerald Bailey. “If you steal from the state, you’re going to be caught. Our state system has a variety of checks and balances in place to detect and stop this type of criminal activity.”

“These programs are vital to needy families throughout Florida and any abuse of the state’s system will be uncovered and we will seek full prosecution of the people involved,” said DCF Secretary Bob Butterworth. “These allegations are disappointing but we’re confident that through cooperation with our partners in law enforcement we can protect the integrity of our public assistance programs.”

FDLE’s financial crimes investigators took on DCF’s case in early November after they were contacted by DCF’s OIG Office regarding the unusual transactions. A routine audit by the Auditor General’s office brought to light suspicions involving particular public assistance cases and DCF’s OIG immediately began to investigate. The investigation involving FDLE investigators and DCF OIG investigators is continuing and additional charges may be forthcoming.

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