



DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

News Release

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

Mark J. Bennett, Attorney General
Phone: (808) 586-1282
Fax: (808) 586-1239

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FRAUD CRACKDOWN CONTINUES

Attorney General Earl I. Anzai announced today that:

On September 12, 2002, John D. Gomes was arrested on a bench warrant issued in connection with an Oahu grand jury indictment charging Gomes with one count of theft in the second degree. Mr. Gomes is accused of exerting control over more than \$8,000.00 in Social Security survivor benefits that were mistakenly issued after the death of the authorized beneficiary. Theft in the second degree is a class C felony punishable by up to five years in prison and by a fine of up to \$10,000 or twice the financial gain derived from the offense, whichever is greater. An indictment is an accusation only. Mr. Gomes is presumed innocent until proven guilty at trial.

The Criminal Justice Division wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Special Agent Chris Castellanos, Office of Investigations, Office of the Inspector General, Social Security Administration, in the investigation of the Gomes case.

On September 11, 2002, the Oahu grand jury returned 7 unrelated indictments charging seven Oahu residents with felony theft offenses. Two individuals were charged with felony theft for fraudulently obtaining unemployment benefits by concealing from the Department of Labor that they were employed. Three individuals were charged with felony theft offenses for fraudulently obtaining public assistance benefits by concealing their true assets, income or household composition. One individual was charged with two felony theft offenses for fraudulently obtaining both unemployment benefits and public assistance benefits. One defendant was charged with tax crimes and a felony theft offense for fraudulently obtaining a state tax refund. The aggregate value of the welfare benefits allegedly stolen in the four cases of welfare fraud exceeds \$159,000.00. Bench warrants for the arrest of the defendants issued in all cases. An indictment is an accusation only. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty at trial. Additional information will be provided when the defendants are apprehended.

On September 9, 2002, First Circuit Court Judge Karen S. S. Ahn denied a request by Haleiwa resident Charlene Kumura, 38, to defer her guilty plea to one count of theft in the first degree. Judge Ahn convicted Kumura of that offense, placed her on probation for five years and ordered

Kumura to pay restitution in the amount of \$27,723.00 to the State of Hawaii and to perform 150 hours of community service. Between January 1, 1998 and February 28, 2001, Ms. Kumura fraudulently obtained public assistance benefits by concealing from the government that two of her minor children were not living in her home.

During the last legislative session, Hawaii lawmakers gave law enforcement authorities a new identity theft statute that became law on June 28, 2002. That law, Act 224, will be a powerful tool in the investigation and prosecution of all types of fraud including insurance fraud, tax fraud, unemployment insurance fraud, welfare fraud, and worker's compensation fraud, as well as the traditional crimes of forgery and theft. But successful investigation and prosecution of those crimes will continue to require the assistance of the public.

Anyone having information concerning Social Security fraud such as the filing of false claims for benefits, bogus disability claims, misusing benefits, buying or selling Social Security cards or Social Security information, fraudulently obtaining or using Social Security numbers, or the misuse of Social Security numbers by individuals with suspected links to terrorist groups or activities, should call the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General Fraud Hotline at 1-800-269-0271 or contact the agency by e-mail at OIG.HOTLINE@SSA.GOV.

Anyone having information concerning unemployment insurance benefit fraud should call the Special Activities Unit of the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations at (808) 586-8947.

Anyone having information concerning state tax crimes should call the Criminal Investigations Unit of the Department of Taxation at (808) 587-1795.

Anyone having information concerning possible welfare fraud crimes should call the Welfare Fraud Hotline at (808) 587-8444.

Every year tips to law enforcement authorities save the State of Hawaii, the United States of America, and ultimately the taxpaying public millions of dollars. Investigators nationwide have documented the fraudulent use of identification documents by organized crime groups, including those associated with terrorist activity, to avoid detection and to steal from public agencies to fund their illegal activities. If you believe that you have information concerning individuals who are stealing from public agencies and/or using false identification, your tip to law enforcement could do more than save money, it may well save lives. Make the call. You can remain anonymous.
