



**United States Attorney's Office
Eastern District of Michigan**

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PRESS RELEASE

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SOUTHFIELD, STERLING HEIGHTS RESIDENTS SENTENCED IN LARGE-SCALE FOOD STAMP FRAUD OPERATION IN DETROIT

Three local party store operators were sentenced yesterday for food stamp fraud, United States Attorney Barbara L. McQuade announced. Dicra Zia, 39, of Southfield, Latif Barash, 42, of Sterling Heights, and Montha Barash, 37, of Sterling Heights were sentenced by the Honorable George Caram Steeh, United States District Judge, for their roles in a large-scale food stamp fraud operation in Detroit.

Dicra Zia was sentenced to 20 months in prison, followed by 2 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$865,204 for trafficking in food stamp benefits. Latif Barash was sentenced to 24 months in prison, followed by 2 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$917,625 in restitution, for food stamp trafficking, money laundering and related welfare fraud. Montha Barash, wife of Latif, was sentenced to 2 years probation and ordered to pay \$52,424, for her crime of theft of government funds relating to food stamp trafficking and welfare fraud. The criminal convictions stem from the defendants' operation of Express Lanes Party Store, located at 12546 Dexter, Detroit, Michigan, from April 2004 through November 2005. The defendants also forfeited more than \$800,000 and the party store.

U.S. Attorney McQuade was joined in the announcement by Joe N. Smith, Special Agent in Charge, United States Department of Agriculture-Office of Inspector General, and Maurice Aouate, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Division.

According to information provided to the court, in April 2004 through November 2005, Dicra Zia and Latif Barash, doing business as Express Lanes, an authorized food stamp program retailer, violated the regulations governing the food stamp program, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, by purchasing food stamp benefits, usually for half of their value, from food stamp benefit recipients.

It was alleged that the defendants purchased more than \$938,000 in food stamp benefits for cash during that period for less than half of their value.

United States Attorney Barbara McQuade said, "Food stamp discounting diverts federal funds intended to feed the poor to business owners who had pledged to participate in the program in good faith."

Special Agent in-Charge Smith said; "The USDA Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations, is committed to aggressively investigating the criminal activities of store owners and employees who deprive needy citizens of the Detroit metropolitan area access to nutritious meals. We appreciate the assistance from our partners in the Federal and state law enforcement community."

Special Agent in Charge Aouate said, "IRS Criminal Investigation's unique role is to follow the money and identify those guilty parties who are financially benefitting from these illegal actions. Working with the United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General, Michigan State Police, and our other law enforcement partners, we will make sure that there are stiff consequences to these types of fraudulent activities that prey on the people that can least afford it."

The case was investigated by special agents of the United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General and the United States Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Division, with the assistance of the Michigan State Police and the Michigan Department of Human Services. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Craig A. Weier and Rita Elizabeth Foley.