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Monday, July 17, 2017

Former DHS Employee Sent to Prison for Scheme to Steal USDA Funds Intended to Feed Hungry Children

LITTLE ROCK—Patrick C. Harris, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, announced Monday that United States District Court Judge James M. Moody, Jr., sentenced Gladys Waits, 37, of Little Rock, to prison for her role in a scheme to steal money intended for feeding children in low income areas.

Judge Moody sentenced Waits, who pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit wire fraud on March 30, 2016, to 108 months' imprisonment, to be followed by three years of supervised release. She was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$9,669,269.66.

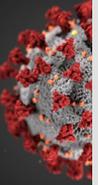
The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) feeding programs in Arkansas are administered through the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS). Sponsors who want to participate in the feeding programs must submit an application to DHS for approval. After they are approved, they can provide meals as part of the feeding programs, and they are reimbursed for the eligible meals they serve.

Waits is the eighth defendant to be sentenced for her involvement in a scheme to fraudulently obtain USDA program funds intended to feed children in low income areas. Other defendants sentenced include: Kattie Jordan, 63 months' imprisonment on March 15, 2016; Reuben Nims, 21 months' imprisonment on November 2, 2016; Tonique Hatton, 108 months' imprisonment on January 4, 2017; James Franklin, 24 months' imprisonment on January 10, 2017; Maria Nelson, 30 months' imprisonment on January 31, 2017; Michael Lee, 30 months' imprisonment on May 1, 2017; and Christopher Nichols, 3 years' probation on May 16, 2017.



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Waymon Weeams, Dortha Harper, Francine Leon, Alexis Young, and Erica Warren have all pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud USDA feeding programs and are awaiting sentencing. Jacqueline Mills and Anthony Waits were convicted on April 6, 2017, following a jury trial and are also awaiting sentencing.

Gladys Waits worked for DHS and her responsibilities included processing applications from sponsors who applied to participate in the feeding programs, determining their eligibility, and approving their proposed feeding sites. Waits was responsible for approving the feeding programs for Mills, Jordan, Nims, Franklin, Nichols, Weeams, and Harper at various times between August 2012 and August 2014. The sponsors submitted claims with inflated numbers of children fed. Waits also helped these sponsors avoid DHS's detection of the fraud.

Gladys Waits received bribe payments from some sponsors, both directly through checks made payable to her and indirectly through checks made payable to relatives, including her husband, Anthony Waits. Anthony Waits recruited sponsors Nims, Franklin, Nichols, Weeams and Harper to participate and they paid a percentage of the proceeds they received from the programs back to Anthony Waits.

The investigation is ongoing and is being conducted by the USDA–Office of Inspector General, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service–Criminal Investigations, and United States Marshals Service. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Jana Harris, Allison W. Bragg, and Cameron McCree.

If you are aware of any fraudulent activity regarding feeding programs, please email that information to USAARE.FeedingProgramFraud@usdoj.gov.

Topic(s):

Public Corruption

Component(s):

USAO - Arkansas, Eastern

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