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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, January 4, 2017

Former DHS Employee Sentenced to Prison in Scheme to Steal USDA Funds Intended to Feed Hungry Children & Little Rock Man Pleads Guilty in Same Scheme

LITTLE ROCK— Christopher R. Thyer, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, announced Wednesday that United States District Court Judge James M. Moody Jr., sentenced Tonique Hatton, 39, of North Little Rock, to prison for her role in a widespread scheme to steal money intended for feeding children in low income areas.

Judge Moody sentenced Hatton, who pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit wire fraud on September 6, 2016, to 108 months' imprisonment, to be followed by two years of supervised release. She was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$7,632,871.77 and to forfeit \$17,681.49.

In a separate case also heard Wednesday, Michael Lee, 26, Little Rock, pleaded guilty to an Indictment charging him with wire fraud. The charges stem from a similar scheme to steal money which was intended to feed children. Lee's plea hearing took place before Chief United States Judge Brian S. Miller, who will sentence Lee at a later date.

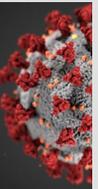
The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) feeding programs in Arkansas are administered through the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS). Sponsors who want to participate in the feeding programs must submit an application to DHS for approval. After they are approved, they can provide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

Lee was a sponsor for a feeding program through Our Children of Tomorrow. Lee had



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two approved feeding sites which were located in Arkadelphia and Little Rock. At these two sites, he claimed as many as 800 children. In truth, no more than 30 children were ever fed at the Arkadelphia site and no children were fed at the Little Rock site. Because of the inflated claims, Our Children of Tomorrow received approximately \$666,428.07.

Hatton is the third defendant sentenced who was charged with involvement in this scheme to fraudulently obtain USDA feeding program funds. Kattie Jordan was sentenced to 63 months in federal prison on March 15, 2016, and Reuben Nims was sentenced to 21 months in federal prison on November 2, 2016. Gladys Waits, Christopher Nichols, Waymon Weeams, James Franklin, Francine Leon, Maria Nelson, Alexis Young, and Erica Warren have all pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud USDA feeding programs and are awaiting sentencing. Jacqueline Mills, Dortha Harper, and Anthony Waits are scheduled for trial on March 27, 2017, before Judge Moody.

Hatton 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. Hatton was responsible for approving the feeding programs for co-defendants Mills and Jordan at various times between January 2012 and August 2014. Mills and Jordan made bribe payments to Hatton to ensure those programs were approved. Some sponsors would claim that hundreds of children were fed at their sites, when few or no children were actually fed there. Hatton also helped Mills and Jordan avoid DHS's detection of the fraud.

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 K. 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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