



DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

News Release

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

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

News Release No. 2002-39 September 3, 2002

WELFARE FRAUD CRACKDOWN CONTINUES

Attorney General Earl I. Anzai announced today that:

On August 30, 2002, First Circuit Court Judge Michael A. Town denied a request by Honolulu Resident Deborah P. Pudiquet, 41, to defer her guilty plea to one count of theft in the first degree. Judge Town convicted her of that offense, placed Ms. Pudiquet on probation for five years and ordered that Pudiquet pay restitution to the State of Hawaii and spend one year in jail as a condition of her probation. The jail term is subject to reconsideration if Ms. Pudiquet is accepted into a comprehensive drug treatment program. Ms. Pudiquet, a first time offender and the mother of five children, admitted in court that if drug tested, she would probably test positive for marijuana, alcohol, and methamphetamine. Over a period of six years beginning in 1995, Ms. Pudiquet fraudulently obtained more than \$160,000 in public assistance benefits by concealing from the government that her minor children were not living with her and were being cared for by her parents.

On August 29, 2002, former Pearl City resident Valerie Lepisi, 28, voluntarily returned to Hawaii at her own expense following her arrest in San Diego for one count of theft in the second degree. Ms. Lepisi pled no contest to the charge and was permitted to return to San Diego until sentencing on February 5, 2003. During 1999 and 2000, Ms. Lepisi fraudulently obtained more than \$19,000 in public assistance benefits while living on Oahu by concealing from the government that the father of her minor children was living with her and employed. By returning to Hawaii at her own expense to deal with this charge, Ms. Lepisi saved the State and ultimately herself substantial extradition expenses. Under Hawaii law, the court can require that an extradited defendant pay the costs associated with the extradition. Those costs can be substantial.

On August 29, 2002, Honolulu resident Satako Etse, 36, was arraigned on an Oahu grand jury indictment charging her with one count of theft in the second degree. Ms Etse is accused of fraudulently obtaining control over more than \$300.00 in public assistance benefits between 1999 and 2001. Ms Etse pled not guilty. Her trial was set for October 28, 2002. An indictment is an accusation only. Ms. Etse is presumed innocent until proven guilty at trial.

On August 20, 2002, First Circuit Court Judge Karl K. Sakamoto, revoked the probation sentence previously imposed on Waianae resident Althia H. Chandler, 44, for one count of theft in the first

degree and re-sentenced her to a new five year probation term with the additional special condition that she be incarcerated for 32 days with credit for time served. Ms. Chandler was sentenced to five years probation on January 8, 2002 for fraudulently obtaining more than \$20,000 in public assistance payments. When Ms. Chandler failed to report for scheduled appointments with her probation officer, the state moved to revoke her probation. While it is true that many first time offenders receive probation sentences for property crimes, the Criminal Justice Division monitors compliance with probation orders. When a defendant fails to comply with the terms of probation, the state moves the court to revoke probation and re-sentence the defendant. Re-sentencing usually means jail or prison.

Anyone having information concerning possible welfare fraud crimes should call the Welfare Fraud Hotline at (808) 587-8444. Telephone calls to the Welfare Fraud Hotline are taken seriously and save the State of Hawaii millions of dollars every year.
