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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CAPE CORAL WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO STEALING FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN FUNDS

Fort Myers, Florida - United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill today announced that Nickie Bradley, age 56, of Cape Coral, pled guilty to theft of public money. Bradley faces a possible sentence of up to 10 years' imprisonment, a maximum fine of \$250,000, restitution to victims of the offense and forfeiture of any property constituting or derived from proceeds obtained as a result of each violation.

According to court documents, the investigation began with a referral from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Federal Student Aid, Case Management team. The Office of Federal Student Aid received a complaint from Mississippi State University (MSU) concerning a collection agency, H.W. Ketchum Collection Agency (Ketchum), that was not reporting and remitting loans collected by Ketchum for MSU. MSU contracted with Ketchum to collect MSU's delinquent Federal Perkins loan accounts.

Federal Perkins loans are made to eligible institutions for the purpose of providing low-interest loans to needy undergraduate and graduate students attending eligible institutions. The U.S. Department of Education provides the money and these are public funds.

Ketchum advertised itself as "Pride in Providing Professional and Ethical Debt Recovery" on their website. Ketchum was owned and operated by Nickie Bradley. The investigation revealed that during 2006-2007, Bradley collected approximately \$359,000

which owed to MSU. Bradley returned approximately \$230,000 to MSU, assessing collection fees of about \$14,000. The investigation concluded that Bradley converted the remaining \$115,000 of collected defaulted loan funds to her own personal use.

"I am proud of the work of OIG Special Agents and their dedication to protecting the integrity of federal education funds," said Mary Mitchelson, Acting Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Education. "This case demonstrates our commitment to pursuing those who seek to enrich themselves at the expense of our nation's students."

The case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Inspector General and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney David Haas.
