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Ten Veteran Affairs Employees Charged With Fraudulent Use of \$16,600 in Transit Program Funds

LOS ANGELES – Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo and Douglas J. Carver, Special Agent in Charge, US Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, Criminal Investigations, Western Field Office, today announced that ten employees of the Veterans Affairs (VA) Greater Los Angeles Health Care System were charged with grand theft.

Current and former VA Medical Center employees Patricia Anderson, Michael Greer, Vera Moland, Hasan Zakeen, Grace Richmond, Keith Pierre, Sharon Villa, Holly Carnes, Deon Gibbons, and Macario Canillas III were each charged with one count of Grand Theft. Nine of the ten were arraigned on May 21 in Department 81 of the Los Angeles Superior Court, Central Arraignment Courts. Seven of the nine defendants pled no contest to the charge of grand theft. The seven who entered pleas of no contest were sentenced to up to 50 hours of community service and ordered to pay restitution. The other three cases are still pending.

The charges stemmed from an August 2008 investigation into the misuse of transportation reimbursement vouchers of the Transit Benefit Program (TBP) at the VA Medical Center in West Los Angeles. Investigators identified widespread abuse of TBP regulations by VA employees, confirming that at least 28 VA employees had violated TBP rules, including the ten charged. The fraudulent activity included workers who drove personal vehicles to work, collected TBP vouchers while they were separated from the VA, or were using government funds to hold a seat in a van pool. Officials determined that the ten charged employees caused \$16,600 in monetary losses to VA.

Other VA employees who abused the TBP have been withdrawn from the program. Since the inception of the investigation, 29% of the program's 624 participants have been withdrawn. The VA has saved \$47,612 in unused TBP vouchers from the 182 employees who have withdrawn from the program.

VA employees who defrauded the TBP were referred to the City Attorney's Criminal and Special Litigation Branch for prosecution by Deputy City Attorney Andrew K. Wong.