

Rhode Island State Police arrest 62 people for public assistance fraud

Colonel James M. Manni, Superintendent of the Rhode Island State Police and Director of the Department of Public Safety, announces that 62 people wanted on outstanding court warrants for felony charges have been arrested and charged with fraudulently obtaining public assistance. State Police are currently searching for 26 other individuals wanted on similar charges.

The 88 suspects allegedly collected approximately \$469,000 in public assistance over the past several years after failing to disclose that they had outstanding felony warrants against them at the time they applied for public assistance, which would have precluded them from obtaining benefits. The outstanding felony warrants included a variety of criminal charges for violent and non-violent crimes, ranging from attempted murder and first-degree robbery to felony shoplifting and narcotics violations.

Colonel Manni said these arrests send a simple message to all Rhode Islanders: "We are cracking down on public assistance fraud. ... Public assistance, the SNAP program and other state benefits are there for those who need and deserve them. We cannot and will not tolerate abuse of this system."

"I would like to thank the State Police and the Attorney General for their continued collaboration to help us combat fraud," said Dorothy Pascale, Chief of the Office of Internal Audit. "I also want to extend my appreciation to my team, who have worked with investigators to mine, match and analyze benefits data. This office serves a critical oversight function to ensure taxpayer dollars are protected from fraud,

waste and abuse. Efforts like this help move our mission forward and enhance benefits program integrity.”

The arrests announced yesterday stemmed from an investigation by members of the Rhode Island State Police Financial Crimes Unit, working with investigators from the Department of Administration Office of Internal Audit – Fraud, Detection and Prevention Unit, into allegations of filing false documents to public officials, perjury and fraudulently obtaining public assistance.

Their investigation was based on an analysis of data by analysts at the Department of Administration, who determined that these 88 individuals allegedly applied for and received public assistance while they were sought on active felony warrants issued by the Rhode Island Superior and District Courts and/or by courts in other states.

According to DOA records, these individuals never reported the outstanding warrants at the time they filed applications for benefits, under penalties of perjury. Federal regulations require all outstanding warrants to be reported on applications for public assistance.

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Over the past two months, members of the Rhode Island State Police Financial Crimes Unit arrested the 62 individuals for allegedly fraudulently applying for and obtaining public assistance. At the time they applied for public assistance, all 62 had active outstanding warrants. However, prior to the Financial Crimes Unit executing the arrest warrants on the new charges, some of these individuals had already appeared in court on their outstanding warrants. Their appearance before the courts on their outstanding warrants did not change the fact that they failed to disclose those warrants when they applied for and obtained public assistance.

Warrants have been issued for the additional 26 subjects.