



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

ROSE GILL HEARN
COMMISSIONER

80 MAIDEN LANE
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212-825-5900

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**CONTACT: DIANE STRUZZI
(212) 825-5931**

DOI INVESTIGATION LEADS TO ARRESTS OF 14 INDIVIDUALS FOR USING FAKE CITY PARKING PERMITS

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation (“DOI”), announced the results of a proactive investigation into the use of fraudulent City Housing Authority (“NYCHA”) employee parking permits displayed on vehicles in outdoor parking lots in public housing developments in Manhattan and the Bronx. The nine individuals arrested yesterday, February 21, 2012, are the latest in a DOI probe that resulted in five other arrests in December 2011 on similar charged criminal conduct. After DOI investigators found an initial fake parking permit last year, DOI expanded its investigation searching for possible similar abuses at other NYCHA public housing developments. DOI investigators canvassed employee and residential parking lots at nearly 100 NYCHA public housing developments, identifying additional fake parking permits, and finding the individuals connected to them. In the cases announced today, DOI investigators found fraudulent NYCHA parking permits displayed in vehicles located in five public housing developments: J.P. Mitchel Houses in the Bronx and the James Weldon Johnson Houses, Frederick Douglass Houses, Martin Luther King, Jr. Towers, and Alfred E. Smith Houses in Manhattan. NYCHA issues parking permits to its employees working at public housing developments. NYCHA residents and non-residents can apply for a limited number of parking permits at the housing developments, which for outdoor parking can cost annually between \$60 and \$272 for residents, and between \$150 and \$650 for non-residents.

The investigation found that the fraudulent parking permits were likely computer-generated facsimiles and bore anomalies to the genuine permits, including a different-colored background and invalid permit numbers. Investigators recovered the fraudulent parking permits they observed. DOI is working with NYCHA to strengthen its oversight of these valuable permits. The individuals charged with possessing the fraudulent permits were not employed by NYCHA.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, “These motorists may have thought they successfully bypassed the expense of parking in New York City. But using bogus City parking permits to park illegally was instead a one-way street to criminal charges.”

DOI’s investigation began after a NYCHA manager reported to DOI that a car parked at the James Weldon Johnson Houses in East Harlem had an apparently fraudulent parking permit. DOI investigators located the vehicle, a 2003 Cadillac, and found the permit was a fake and had not been issued to the individual associated with the car. As part of a wider search, investigators found four additional fraudulent permits, one at the Frederick Douglass Houses on the Upper West Side, one at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Towers in East Harlem and two at the Alfred E. Smith Houses in Lower Manhattan. In December 2011, DOI arrested five individuals on charges of Forgery in the Second Degree, a class D felony, and Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Third Degree and Criminal Impersonation in the Second Degree, class A misdemeanors. These cases are being prosecuted by the office of New York County District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. Upon conviction, a class D felony is punishable by up to seven years in prison and a class A misdemeanor by up to a year’s incarceration.

The nine individuals arrested yesterday in the Bronx were given desk appearance tickets charging each of them with Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Third Degree, a class A misdemeanor, and a June 2012 date to return to Bronx Criminal Court for arraignment. Their cases have been referred to the office of Bronx County District Attorney Robert T. Johnson.

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanked Bronx County District Attorney Robert T. Johnson, New York County District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., and NYCHA Chairman John B. Rhea and their staffs for their assistance and cooperation on this investigation.

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The investigation was conducted by DOI's Office of Inspector General for NYCHA.

Assistant District Attorney Peter L. D'Angelo is prosecuting the nine Bronx cases, under the supervision of Thomas D. Kapp, Chief of the Bronx District Attorney's Arson/Auto/Economic Crime Bureau. Assistant District Attorney Alexandra Lane at the New York County District Attorney's Office is prosecuting the five Manhattan cases, under the supervision of Senior Supervising Assistant District Attorney Stuart Silberg.

Arrest charges and criminal complaints are accusations. Defendants and individuals arrested are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Information on Individuals Arrested:

Bronx Arrests

- 1: Denise Lopez, 40, of the Lower East Side of Manhattan
- 2: Augustin Trinidad, 34, of the Mott Haven section of the Bronx
- 3: Fina Coca Cleto, 31, of Philadelphia, PA
- 4: Ali Yafai, 30, of the Wakefield section of the Bronx
- 5: Francelia Villalona, 47, of Clifton, New Jersey
- 6: Craig Crump, 44, of the Mott Haven section of the Bronx
- 7: Wilfredo Gordon, 56, of the Mott Haven section of the Bronx
- 8: Jose Echevarria, 51, of the Mott Haven section of the Bronx
- 9: Angela Sewer, 43, of Union, NJ

Manhattan Arrests (occurred in December 2011)

- 1: Jessica Escalera, 33, of the Upper West Side of Manhattan, charged with possessing a forged NYCHA employee parking permit in the parking lot of Frederick Douglass Houses.
- 2: Hoy Chan, 28, of Lower Manhattan, charged with possessing a forged NYCHA employee parking permit in the parking lot of Alfred E. Smith Houses.
- 3: Tory Chisolm, 31, of Lower Manhattan, charged with possessing a forged NYCHA employee parking permit in the parking lot of Alfred E. Smith Houses.
- 4: Jennifer Smith, 28, of East Harlem in Manhattan, charged with possessing a forged NYCHA employee parking permit in the parking lot of James Weldon Johnson Houses.
- 5: Bernadette Peralta, 52, of East Harlem in Manhattan, charged with possessing a forged NYHCA employee parking permit in the parking lot of Martin Luther King, Jr. Towers.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country. The agency investigates and refers for prosecution City employees and contractors engaged in corrupt or fraudulent activities or unethical conduct. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City.

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