

# NEWS RELEASE

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**Luis A. Valentin, Prosecutor**

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## **FORMER MIDDLETOWN WOMAN ADMITS UNLAWFUL USE OF HER FORMER HUSBAND'S IDENTITY TO FRAUDULENTLY OBTAIN OVER \$49,000 IN NEW JERSEY STATE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS**

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On January 11, 2010, Donna Crowder, a/k/a Donna Miller, 39, of Painter, Virginia, formerly of Middletown, N.J., appeared in Monmouth County Superior Court and pled guilty to one count of third degree Theft by Deception and one count of third degree Impersonation – Theft of Identity. The guilty plea was accepted by Monmouth County Superior Court Judge Ronald L. Reisner. The charges relate to Crowder's unlawful use of her then-husband's identity to fraudulently obtain numerous unemployment checks in his name which she then used for her own benefit.

Crowder's illegal use of her husband's identification was the subject of an investigation which was conducted by the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office. The investigation revealed that in 2002, Crowder, while still married to her husband and residing with him in Middletown Township, N.J., unlawfully used her husband's identity to apply for unemployment benefits in his name with the State of New Jersey. The investigation further revealed that Crowder continued to illegally use her husband's name, social security number and Department of Labor Personal Identification Number ("P.I.N.") until November 2004 without his knowledge to fraudulently obtain a total of 60 State unemployment checks.

In total, Crowder unlawfully received approximately \$49,086 in benefits from the New Jersey Department of Labor. Several of the checks were deposited into bank accounts that were exclusively controlled by Crowder. The investigation additionally revealed that Crowder prevented her husband from learning of her actions by falsely notifying the Department of Labor that her husband's address had changed.

The investigation began when Crowder's former husband contacted the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office in August 2008. The victim reported that he and Crowder divorced in September 2006 and that they had each thereafter relocated separately outside the State of New Jersey. After the divorce, the former husband received notification from the Internal Revenue Service that he was in arrears because he had not paid the proper taxes on the unemployment benefits which records showed that he had received. The victim then contacted the New Jersey Department of Labor. The Department of Labor cooperated with the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office and the investigation.

A Monmouth County Grand Jury returned an indictment against Crowder on August 17, 2009, and a warrant for her arrest was issued at that time. Crowder was arrested in Maryland on September 7, 2009, and she was returned to Monmouth County voluntarily on October 4, 2009, after she waived her right to an extradition hearing. Crowder is being held at the Monmouth County Correctional Institution in lieu of \$20,000 bail.

Crowder entered her guilty plea pursuant to a negotiated plea agreement with the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office. In accordance with the terms of the negotiated plea agreement, the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office will recommend that Judge Reisner sentence Crowder to concurrent four year State Prison terms and order Crowder to pay restitution to the State of New Jersey as well as to her former husband.

As a result of Crowder's unlawful use of her former husband's identity, Crowder's former husband incurred in excess of \$17,243 in legal fees and other expenses in his efforts to clear his name with the Department of Labor and the Internal Revenue Service. Under New Jersey law, the Court may order a defendant who has been convicted of Impersonation – Theft of Identity to pay restitution to a victim for expenses resulting from the victim's efforts to clear his credit record as well as any monetary loss incurred by the victim as a result of any civil or administrative proceeding resulting from the defendant's conduct.

Monmouth County Prosecutor Luis A. Valentin stated, "Crowder's unlawful conduct created two separate and distinct victims. First, by illegally utilizing her former husband's identity in the manner which she did, Crowder caused her former husband to incur thousands of dollars in expenses in his efforts to clear his name. Crowder also victimized the State of New Jersey and its taxpayers by fraudulently obtaining unemployment benefits which she was not entitled to."

Crowder is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Reisner on March 5, 2010.

The case is assigned to Assistant Monmouth County Prosecutor Nicole Colucci. Crowder is represented by Michael DeBlis, III, Esquire, of Freehold, N.J.

Released: January 11, 2010