



February 15, 2011

**MADIGAN: DHS CASEWORKER ARRAIGNED ON CHARGES IN
ALLEGED KICKBACK SCHEME**

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced that an Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) caseworker was arraigned on fraud and official misconduct charges for allegedly bilking the state out of thousands of dollars.

Margarita Lopez, 45, of Chicago pleaded not guilty today in Cook County Circuit Court to one count each of Wire Fraud, Mail Fraud and Intimidation, and two counts of Official Misconduct for her role in a scheme to defraud taxpayers by fraudulently enrolling family and friends in an IDHS caretaker program in order to receive kickback payments from them. Lopez is currently on administrative leave.

"Ms. Lopez's acts cheated not only the taxpayers who fund the programs she was entrusted to manage but also those who rely on these vital state services," said Attorney General Madigan.

Lopez's responsibilities at IDHS included assisting disabled and physically incapacitated individuals find caretakers to help them in their homes. These caretakers, known as personal assistants, are paid an hourly rate by IDHS based on the timesheets they submit to the agency. Lopez allegedly enticed several family members and friends to split with Lopez money they received for work they never performed as personal assistants. In certain cases, Lopez supplied individuals with names of fictional patients and fictional medical conditions. Several witnesses told a Cook County grand jury last month that they split checks they received from the state with Lopez. Investigators found that the witnesses' testimony was backed up by bank records indicating that Lopez deposited a total of \$13,075 into her checking accounts from December 2008 through June 2009.

All of the charges are Class 3 felonies punishable by two to five years in the Illinois Department of Corrections. Lopez is free on a personal recognizance bond. Judge Art Hill set her next court appearance for March 16, 2011.

The investigation was conducted by Attorney General Madigan's Public Integrity Bureau with assistance from IDHS and the Office of the Executive Inspector General. Assistant Attorney General David Navarro is handling the case for Madigan's Public Integrity Bureau.

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