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MADIGAN: DHS CASEWORKER GUILTY IN KICKBACK SCHEME

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan announced a Cook County jury has found an Illinois Department of Human Services caseworker guilty on fraud and official misconduct charges for allegedly bilking the state out of thousands of dollars.

Margarita Lopez, 46, of Chicago, was found guilty late Friday by a jury in Cook County Circuit Court for her role in a scheme to defraud taxpayers through kickback payments she received from family and friends who were fraudulently enrolled in an IDHS caretaker program.

“Ms. Lopez concocted a scheme using fictional names and medical conditions to cheat the taxpayers who fund this caretaker program and those who legitimately rely on the program’s vital services,” Madigan said.

Madigan said the jury found Lopez guilty on all counts: wire fraud, mail fraud and intimidation, and two counts of official misconduct – all Class 3 felonies punishable by two to five years in the Illinois Department of Corrections. She is being held in Cook County jail awaiting an April 6 sentencing.

Lopez’s responsibilities at IDHS included helping disabled and physically incapacitated people to find in-home caretakers. These caretakers, known as personal assistants, are paid an hourly rate by IDHS based on the timesheets they submit to the agency. In certain cases, Lopez supplied her family members and friends with names of fictional patients and fictional medical conditions. Lopez then enticed these family members and friends to split with her the money they received for work they never performed as personal assistants.

Witnesses testified that they split the checks they received from the state with Lopez. Investigators found their testimony was backed up by bank records indicating Lopez deposited \$13,075 into her checking accounts from December 2008 through June 2009.

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 Attorneys General David Navarro, Martin Van Kampen and Kathleen Farrell Duhig handled the case for Madigan’s Public Integrity Bureau.

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