



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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*Office of the United States Attorney  
District of Arizona*

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## **FORMER PHOENIX RESIDENT CHARGED AND ARRESTED FOR THEFT OF OVER \$60,000 OF VETERAN'S BENEFITS**

PHOENIX - Michele Marie Valent, 38, formerly of Phoenix, pleaded guilty today to Theft of Government Funds after stealing over \$60,000 from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Sentencing is set for July 13, 2009 at 3:00 in front of U.S. District Judge Neil V. Wake.

Valent admitted in the course of her guilty plea that from March 4, 2004 through December 2, 2008, she stole approximately \$53,556, by continuing to receive U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Benefits for herself as the unmarried widow of a deceased veteran, even though Valent was no longer eligible for the benefits because she had remarried on March 4, 2004. Valent had been previously married to Arizona Army National Guardsman who was killed during a training exercise at Fort Rucker, Alabama, on December 12, 2002.

She admitted that from October 1, 2004 through December 2, 2008, Valent stole approximately \$9,804 of additional benefits by receiving VA Dependents' Educational Assistance Program benefits for herself after falsely claiming that she was the unmarried widow of a deceased veteran. Valent also admitted that on October 7, 2008, Valent made a false statement on a VA Declaration of Status of Dependents form. On the form she stated that she was a surviving spouse of a deceased veteran, that she had not remarried since the death of her spouse on December 12, 2002, and that she was entitled to continue to receive VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Benefits for herself as a widow of a veteran, even though she was no longer eligible for the benefits because she had remarried.

A conviction for Theft of Government Funds carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Wake will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Valent was arrested without incident in Douglas County, Colorado on February 10, 2009, and will remain in federal custody pending sentencing.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - Office of Inspector General. The prosecution is being handled by Frederick A. Battista, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-08-1418-PHX-NVW  
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