



PRESS NOTICE

W. WALTER WILKINS UNITED STATES ATTORNEY DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

*1441 Main Street, Suite 500 * Columbia, SC 29201 * (803) 929-3000**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT PERSON: KEVIN F. MCDONALD
(803) 929-3000

COMPANION EMPLOYEE SENTENCED FOR WORKERS' COMPENSATION FRAUD

Columbia, South Carolina---- United States Attorney W. Walter Wilkins stated today that Tammy C. Watkins, age 40, of Columbia, South Carolina, was sentenced today in federal court for conspiracy to commit mail fraud, a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349. United States District Judge Joseph F. Anderson, Jr., sentenced Watkins to 57 months imprisonment and ordered her to pay over \$157,000 in restitution, which was her share of approximately \$480,000 in total fraud committed.

Evidence presented at the change of plea hearing established that Watkins was an employee of Companion Property & Casualty Insurance (CPCI), a subsidiary of BlueCross BlueShield (BCBS) of South Carolina. Watkins, along with previously-

sentenced employees Natasha Henderson and Chanell Bates, changed federal tax identification numbers of legitimate BCBS health care providers to individuals who were not health care providers. These individuals, who did not work for BCBS, would receive workers' compensation checks in the mail, cash the checks at banks using bogus accounts they established, and then distribute the proceeds among the seven charged participants. All of the co-conspirators obtained approximately \$487,346.98 through this scheme as a result of 116 fraudulent checks being cashed.

The fraud initially was discovered by the Special Investigations Unit of BCBS, along with CPCI, who then referred the matter to agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorney Winston D. Holliday, Jr., of the Columbia office handled the case.

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