



# Department of Justice

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## **FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ATLANTA NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION PLEADS GUILTY TO EMBEZZLEMENT SCHEME**

### ***Rice Stole Nearly \$300,000 from the Medical Association of Atlanta over a Four-year Period***

ATLANTA, GA - SHARON L. RICE, 46, of LaGrange, Georgia, pleaded guilty today in federal district court to one count of wire fraud in connection with a scheme to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Medical Association of Atlanta ("MAA"), a non-profit organization, during her tenure as its Executive Director.

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said of today's plea, "Non-profit organizations like MAA trust their executives to act in the best interests of their members without regard to profit and personal financial gain. This defendant betrayed that trust by using her position to steal money that she should have been safeguarding rather than looting, a decision that may now lead her into a federal prison cell."

According to United States Attorney Yates, the charges and other information presented in court: From November 2000 until May 2008, RICE served as the Executive Director of MAA, a non-profit, tax-exempt professional association of between 600-1000 Atlanta-area doctors, which advocates on behalf of doctors in the Georgia General Assembly and other legislative forums and helps provide continuing medical education courses. Although RICE ultimately reported to MAA's Board of Directors, RICE was responsible for managing MAA's day-to-day operations and supervising a small administrative staff.

Beginning in February 2004, when MAA's full-time Director of Finance went on leave and ultimately separated from MAA, RICE also assumed responsibility for MAA's finances, which included bookkeeping, payroll, and managing MAA's bank accounts and investments. While carrying out these duties between February 2004 and May 2008, RICE wrote nearly \$300,000 in checks to herself outside of her regular MAA payroll and checks to her MAA Visa card to pay for unauthorized personal expenses, all of which were drawn upon MAA's bank accounts at Fidelity Bank and Bank of America. RICE was able to conceal the scheme from MAA's Board of Directors, other MAA employees,

the banks, and MAA's outside accountants by making false entries in MAA's bookkeeping software that attributed the payments to MAA vendors and other legitimate business purposes, by forging co-signatures on some of the checks, and by indicating on the checks themselves that the payments were for legitimate purposes.

Notably, while her scheme was ongoing, on October 13, 2007, RICE accepted a state-wide award from the Medical Association of Georgia for distinguished service by a non-physician in the advancement of medicine, including for efforts to ensure the financial stability of MAA, Georgia's largest county medical association.

A federal grand jury returned the indictment against RICE in this case on March 9, 2010, charging 14 counts of wire fraud and 2 counts of mail fraud. As part of a plea agreement, RICE pleaded guilty today to one count of wire fraud, for which she could receive a maximum sentence of up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. In determining the actual sentence, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate sentencing ranges for most offenders. Among other factors, the Sentencing Guidelines advise the Court to consider the conduct underlying the remaining counts to which RICE did not plead guilty and the overall financial loss to MAA in fashioning an appropriate sentence.

RICE's sentencing is scheduled for August 25, 2010, at 9:30 a.m., before United States District Judge William S. Duffey, Jr.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Assistant United States Attorney David M. Chaiken is prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is [www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan).