

Department of Justice

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Former Treasurer for Chicago Black Nurses Association Pleads Guilty to Fraud Scheme

Springfield, Ill. – A Chicago woman who formerly served as treasurer for the Chicago Chapter of the National Black Nurses Association (CCBNA), Tonja Cook, 45, entered a plea of guilty this afternoon to a single count of mail fraud related to a scheme to defraud various state grant programs. Cook appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Byron G. Cudmore.

Sentencing has been scheduled for March 25, 2013, before U.S. District Judge Sue E. Myerscough. According to the terms of the conditional plea agreement, if accepted by the court, Cook faces a sentence of no greater than 33 months in prison. Cook may also be ordered to pay restitution. Cook was allowed to remain on bond pending sentencing.

Cook, a registered nurse, served as the treasurer of the Chicago Chapter of the National Black Nurses Association at the time of the scheme, from 2005 to 2009. Cook admitted to her role in the scheme to defraud, as assisting and acting at the direction of the chapter's program director, Margaret Davis, who solicited and received more than \$1,000,000 in funds from various state agencies. Further, as a result of the scheme, as much as \$500,000 or more of grant and contract funds was converted to their personal use and benefit as well as to the benefit of others, including Davis's personal and political associates, family members and friends.

Davis remains charged with 14 counts of mail fraud and two counts of money laundering related to the alleged scheme. Trial for Davis is scheduled to begin on Jan. 15, 2013, before Judge Myerscough.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy A. Bass is prosecuting the case on behalf of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of Illinois. The investigation is being conducted by participating agencies of the Central District of Illinois' U.S. Attorney's Office's Public Corruption Task Force including the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Chicago Division; the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations; the Illinois Secretary of State Office of Inspector General; and the Illinois State Police Division of Internal Investigation. Individuals who wish to provide information to law enforcement regarding matters of public corruption are urged to call the U.S. Attorney's Office at 217-492-4450.

From December 2005 to June 2009, according to the indictment, Davis allegedly solicited and received 15 different grants and contracts totaling \$1,062,000 on behalf of the CCBNA from Illinois state agencies including the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity; Department of Public Health; Department of Human Services; and the State Board of Education.

(More)

Davis allegedly represented that the funds would be used to conduct numerous healthcare advocacy-related and nursing student assistance activities, including recruitment of 200 students to participate in the “Young Enough to Make a Difference Project;” educational activities to promote public awareness of HIV/AIDS, breast and cervical cancer, prostate cancer, and pandemic flu; and, implementation of two nursing student internship programs.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is merely an accusation; each defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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