



***United States Attorney
Southern District of New York***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
YUSILL SCRIBNER,
REBEKAH CARMICHAEL
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600**

**SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION,
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
JOHN GRASSO
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 264-4848**

**UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE
MICHAEL SEREMETIS
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(718) 840-1106**

**OFFICE MANAGER CHARGED WITH EMBEZZLING SOCIAL SECURITY
FUNDS INTENDED FOR DISABLED CHILDREN**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, EDWARD J. RYAN, Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General ("SSA OIG"), and JAMES CAWLEY, Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the United States Secret Service, announced that LAVERNE GARRETT was arrested yesterday, March 20, 2007, for embezzling SSA benefits that were allocated for developmentally disabled children. According to the Complaint filed in Manhattan federal court:

From 2001 until about February 2006, GARRETT was the office manager at the Henry Ittelson Center (the "Center"). The Center received SSA funds on behalf of developmentally disabled children who resided at the Center. As the office manager, GARRETT was responsible for maintaining these funds on behalf of these children.

After an audit revealed that approximately \$26,000 in SSA funds allocated to the Center on behalf of developmentally disabled children was missing, federal agents launched an investigation. The investigation revealed that from 2004 until about November 2005, GARRETT stole portions of the SSA funds

which were entrusted to her. Although GARRETT initially denied stealing any of the SSI benefits to which she was entrusted, she later admitted to the criminal activity stating that she felt she had been treated unfairly by the Center and that she was overworked and underpaid.

GARRETT, 38, of Ozone Park, New York, was arrested yesterday morning in Manhattan, New York, after voluntarily surrendering. She was presented in United States District Court for the Southern District of New York and was released on her own recognizance. If convicted, GARRETT faces a maximum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative work of the SSA OIG and the United States Secret Service.

Assistant United States Attorney CHRISTOPHER L. LAVIGNE in charge of the prosecution.

The charges and allegations contained in the Complaint are merely accusations and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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