



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 31, 2010

CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
YUSILL SCRIBNER,
JANICE OH
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600

DOI
DIANE STRUZZI
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 825-5931

**TWO FORMER EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS OF THE
CORRECTIONS OFFICERS' BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION
CHARGED IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT FOR FILING
A FALSE LIFE INSURANCE CLAIM**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and ROSE GILL HEARN, the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), announced that ALLEN BLAKE and CHANDRA LaSONDE, two former members of the executive board of the Corrections Officers' Benevolent Association ("COBA"), were charged today for their roles in committing mail fraud by submitting a false life insurance claim. BLAKE and LaSONDE surrendered this morning and are expected to be presented this afternoon in Manhattan federal court before United States Magistrate Judge FRANK MAAS. According to the Complaint:

All corrections officers with COBA are eligible to enroll in a dependent life insurance policy that is administered through an insurance company. In order to submit a dependent life insurance claim form, a corrections officer must contact the COBA board member who is in charge of processing insurance claims. The board member must first sign the form as the authorized COBA representative and then mail the claim form to the insurance company.

Until October 13, 2009, LaSONDE served in COBA's Benefits Division and was familiar with the process of submitting dependent life insurance claims. On October 23, 2009, LaSONDE, who no longer worked in COBA's Benefits Division, mailed a claim for a dependent life insurance benefit on behalf of BLAKE. The claim falsely identified BLAKE as being married to his wife, PEARL BLAKE, the dependent. However, in truth and in fact, BLAKE

divorced PEARL BLAKE in June 2009, several months before she died.

On November 10, 2009, BLAKE received proceeds from his fraudulent life insurance claim totaling approximately \$10,000. Later that month, other members of the COBA executive board discovered that BLAKE and LaSONDE had submitted a false claim on behalf of BLAKE. Subsequently, BLAKE admitted to a COBA board member that he knew he was not entitled to the benefit, and that LaSONDE knew that the claim was falsely submitted. BLAKE and LaSONDE also resigned from COBA's executive board following BLAKE's admission of fraudulently submitting a fraudulent life insurance claim.

If convicted of the mail fraud count with which they are charged, BLAKE, 53, of Hempstead, New York, and LaSONDE, 44, of Middletown, New York, each face a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000.

U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA said, "Allen Blake allegedly exploited the death of his wife and went after \$10,000 in a bogus insurance claim submitted by Chandra LaSonde. As elected board members of the Corrections Officers' Benevolent Association, Blake and LaSonde were supposed to be role models for the rest of New York City corrections officers, and they allegedly failed in that responsibility. Together with our partners at DOI, we will continue to go after those who abuse their elected positions in order to line their pockets."

DOI Commissioner ROSE GILL HEARN said, "These two veteran City corrections officers paired up in a scheme to turn an ex-wife's death into an illicit cash windfall, according to the Complaint. Their venture in deceit justly ended with their removal from positions of trust in their union, suspension from well-paid law enforcement jobs, and arrest and prosecution on felony fraud charges. These results show that crime doesn't pay. DOI and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District will continue to root out corruption and fraud."

Mr. BHARARA praised the work of DOI in this investigation.

Assistant United States Attorney SANTOSH ARAVIND is in charge of the prosecution.

The charge contained in the Complaint is merely an accusation, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.