

Department of Justice

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TSA WORKER SENTENCED ON CORRUPTION CHARGES

BUFFALO, N.Y.--U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Minnetta Walker, 44, of Buffalo, N.Y., who was convicted of conspiracy to defraud the United States, was sentenced to 24 months in prison, to be followed by one year supervised released, by U.S. District Court Judge Richard J. Arcara.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary Catherine Baumgarten, who handled the case, stated that Walker was employed by the United States Department of Homeland Security, Transportation Security Administration (TSA), as a Behavior Detection Officer, assigned to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport (Buffalo Airport) in Cheektowaga, New York. TSA is responsible for ensuring passenger safety and national security as it relates to the country's air transportation system. The defendant's official position required that she observe, detect and analyze conduct and behavior in persons throughout the airport, which indicated a particular traveler could be a threat to aviation security.

The investigation established that while on official duty, Walker assisted certain individuals in bypassing the normal security procedures, measures, and requirements at the Buffalo Airport. The defendant's criminal conduct included allowing one suspected narcotics trafficker to travel under a fictitious name, and permitting that individual to bypass the Ticket Document Checker, whose job is to examine persons, property and other articles entering aircraft and the airport area at the Buffalo Airport. Walker also on occasion directed the suspected narcotic trafficker to bypass the body image scanner/pat-down security line, and interfered with a screener's ability to monitor the x-ray of his belongings.

In addition, the defendant admitted that she alerted at least one other suspected trafficker to the fact that police officers were conducting undercover surveillance of him. The two suspected narcotics traffickers are pending indictment on unrelated narcotics

conspiracy charges, and are presumed innocent unless and until convicted in a Court of law.

Other individuals convicted to date in the public corruption aspects of the investigation consist of former U.S. Airways employee Tinisha Tucker-Anthony and Regina R. McCullen, a former City of Buffalo employee, both of whom provided one of the suspected narcotics traffickers with fraudulent travel and identification documents, respectively. Miguel Guzman, meanwhile, has been convicted of narcotic conspiracy charges in connection with this case, and is awaiting sentencing.

U.S. Attorney Hochul stated that “as a TSA employee, Minetta Walker represented one of the nation’s last lines of defense when it comes to airline safety and national security. In this position, the public had a right to expect from Walker the highest degree of honesty and integrity. By abusing her position of trust, Walker not only dishonored her profession, she permitted illegal narcotics trafficking to continue to the detriment of the Western New York community. Today’s sentence sends a strong message that such behavior will not be permitted by this Office.”

The sentencing is part of an ongoing investigation by Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Christopher M. Piehota; Transportation Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, under the direction of Federal Security Director, Derek DePietro; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of James C. Spero; U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, under the direction of Wilbert L. Plummer, Acting Special Agent in Charge, New York Field Division; and NFTA Transit Police, under the direction of Chief George Gast.

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