

# Department of Justice

United States Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr.  
Western District of New York

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## **CITY OF BUFFALO EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO STEALING THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FROM PARKING METERS**

BUFFALO, N.Y.-- U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Lawrence Charles, 40, of Buffalo, New York, pleaded guilty to stealing fifteen thousand dollars from the City of Buffalo, a Governmental agency which receives federal funding. The guilty plea, which occurred before U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara, carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, a fine of \$250,000 or both. The defendant also is required to pay restitution.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Maura K. O'Donnell, who handled the case, stated that the defendant was employed by the City of Buffalo for approximately 17 years. In 2007, Charles began working as a parking meter mechanic for the City. In this capacity, Charles was responsible for repairing defective parking meter machines, but was not authorized to collect any money deposited into the machines.

Commencing in April 2007, and continuing through December 2011, instead of repairing the machines for which he was responsible, Charles systematically utilized his position as to steal money which was inserted into the parking meters machines. On some occasions, the defendant rigged parking meters in order to make the money easier to access and steal. The Government stated that its evidence could establish the defendant stole approximately \$15,000 in the time frame of his repair duties. Charles secreted the quarters in parking enforcement envelopes and other containers inside his City of Buffalo vehicle. The defendant then removed the money at the end of his shift.

In 2011, the City of Buffalo's Department of Parking Enforcement initiated a review of parking meters after suspecting that quarters were being stolen from the meters. This review determined that the metal guides that direct the quarters into the lower compartment of the meters were damaged resulting in some quarters remaining in the

upper compartment. This made the quarters accessible to the mechanics who otherwise would not have had access to the coins. Subsequently, video surveillance was conducted which showed that the defendant stole quarters from the meters on a daily basis.

The defendant was arrested in December 2011 along with another employee who was also employed a parking meter mechanic. Similar charges against that employee are pending. The fact that a defendant has been charged with a crime is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

"This defendant may have thought he was just robbing quarters," said U.S. Attorney Hochul. "But in fact he was stealing the public's trust. Our Office, along with our law enforcement partners, will continue to root out public corruption wherever it occurs."

The arrests are the culmination of an investigation on the part Special Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Christopher M. Piehota and the Buffalo Police Department, under the direction of Commissioner Daniel Derenda.

Sentencing is scheduled for December 11, 2012 at 12:30 p.m. before Judge Arcara.

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