

Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DECEMBER 12, 2011
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TWO CITY OF BUFFALO EMPLOYEES CHARGED WITH STEALING THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FROM PARKING METERS

BUFFALO, N.Y.-- U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that James Bagarozzo, 56, and Lawrence Charles, 39, both of Buffalo, New York, were arrested and charged in two Criminal Complaints (one for each defendant) with stealing thousands of dollars from the City of Buffalo, a Governmental agency which receives federal funding. The charges carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, a fine of \$250,000 or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Maura K. O'Donnell, who is handling the case, stated that the defendants are employed as parking meter mechanics for the City of Buffalo. In this capacity, both defendants had the responsibility of repairing defective parking meter machines, but were not authorized to collect any money deposited into the machines.

According to the Complaints, in the time periods alleged, defendants Bagarozzo and Charles – instead of repairing the meter machines for which they were responsible - systematically utilized their positions as City of Buffalo Parking Enforcement repairmen to steal the money which was inserted into the parking meter machines. On some occasions, the Complaints allege that the defendants rigged parking meter machines in order to make the money collect in an area of the machine easier to access and steal.

In the time period of 2003 to 2011, the Bagarozzo Complaint alleges that the defendant systematically stole an estimated \$210,000 from the parking meters he was charged with repairing. The Complaint indicates that agents also recovered approximately \$40,000 hidden in the ceiling of the defendant's bathroom as well as \$3,000 in quarters and another \$4,100 in cash.

Regarding defendant Charles, the Complaint alleges that Charles stole between \$3,363 and \$4,712 in one 32 day period, and additional funds over various months in the time period from 2009 to 2011.

"Public corruption by an employee at any level of government is a breach of the public's trust," said U.S. Attorney Hochul. "This Office stands committed to pursuing any allegations regarding public corruption wherever it occurs. This case should serve as a warning to any individual who would consider committing similar behavior."

"Today's developments demonstrate the FBI's continued commitment to identify and defeat public corruption on all organizational levels," said Special Agent in Charge Christopher Piehota. "With the initial and continual support of the City of Buffalo's Parking Commissioner, Kevin Helfer, the FBI and the Buffalo Police Department worked collaboratively to bring this investigation to a successful conclusion."

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.

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