

Department of Justice

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TSA WORKER, CITY OF BUFFALO EMPLOYEE PLEAD GUILTY TO FEDERAL CHARGES IN CONNECTION WITH OFFICIAL DUTIES

BUFFALO, N.Y.--U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Minnetta Walker, 43, an officer with the federal Transportation Security Administration, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara, to conspiracy to defraud the United States.

Regina R. McCullen, 53, a Customer Assistant with the City of Buffalo Clerk's Office, pleaded guilty before Judge Arcara, to conspiracy to commit fraud in connection with identification documents.

The conspiracy charge against Walker carries a maximum term of 5 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both, while the document conspiracy charge against McCullen carries a maximum term of 15 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary Catherine Baumgarten, who is handling both case, stated that through February 2011, Walker had been 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 an agency 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.

As part of her guilty plea, defendant Walker admitted (among other things) that while on official duty, she assisted certain individuals, including Derek Frank, in bypassing the normal security procedures, measures, and requirements at the Buffalo Airport. The defendant's criminal conduct included allowing Frank to travel under a fictitious name, and permitting Frank 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. The defendant also on

occasion directed Frank to bypass the body image scanner/pat-down security line, and interfered with a screener's ability to monitor the x-ray of Frank's belongings.

Defendant Walker also admitted that she alerted two individuals, including Antonio Briggs, to the fact that police officers were conducting undercover surveillance of Briggs. Both Frank and Briggs are pending indictment for narcotics conspiracy charges, and are presumed innocent unless and until convicted in a Court of law.

Sentencing for Walker is scheduled for January 4, 2011, at 12:30 p.m., in Buffalo, N.Y., before Judge Arcara.

Defendant McCullen, meanwhile, while on official duty at the City of Buffalo Clerk's Office, admitted that she used her official position to illegally produce in July 2010, a birth certificate card issued by the City of Buffalo. While the fingerprint and photograph on the fictitious card was that of Derek Anthony, the name on the birth certificate was that of another person. Thereafter, that same fictitious birth certificate card was used by Derek Frank to travel via airlines between Buffalo, New York and Phoenix, Arizona.

Sentencing for defendant McCullen is scheduled for December 20, 2011, at 12:30 p.m., in Buffalo, N.Y., before Judge Arcara.

Regarding the Walker conviction, United States Attorney Hochul said, "The public has the right to expect that airport security officers will faithfully perform their important role of keeping air travelers safe." Hochul added, "When a TSA or any law enforcement officer abuses their position of trust, and instead helps others evade the law, this Office will vigorously prosecute that officer regardless of their badge."

Christopher M. Piehota , Special Agent in Charge, FBI, Buffalo Office stated "In this case, a federal employee who worked as a behavioral detection officer made the choice to interfere and obstruct security measures. Her acts not only defrauded the government but also allowed others to further criminal acts of their own. The public should be assured that the safe travel of our citizens is an absolute priority for the law enforcement community."

As for McCullen, US Attorney Hochul stated that, "In her particular public office, Regina McCullen was responsible for producing important official identification documents which are regularly used in any number of ways in our society. Such officials must act with the utmost integrity and care. Because McCullen disregarded the responsibilities of her position, and willingly broke the law, she will now be punished accordingly."

The pleas are a part of an ongoing investigation on the part of 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. Drug Enforcement Administration, under the direction of Dale Kasprzyk; NFTA Transit Police, under the direction of Chief George Gast, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of James C. Spero.

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