

Department of Justice

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Western District of New York

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FORMER UNION LEADER ADMITS THEFT OF UNION FUNDS

BUFFALO, N.Y.--U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that former union leader Ellis Woods, 61, of Clarence, N.Y., pleaded guilty to wire fraud before U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara. The charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Russell T. Ippolito, Jr., who is handling the case, stated that the defendant devised a scheme to defraud the Buffalo Educational Support Team ("BEST"). BEST is a union representing more than 900 teacher's aides and assistants in the Buffalo school district. While working as the elected President of BEST, Woods was provided a union issued credit card. Between November 18, 2008, and February 7, 2011, Woods used the union credit card to pay for personal expenses, including gambling expenses that he incurred at local area casinos. In total, Woods stole \$44,987.70 in union funds.

"Union members contribute hard earned money to benefit the union as a whole, not to line the pockets of union leaders," said U.S. Attorney Hochul. "Our Office will not tolerate such behavior and will vigorously prosecute officials in any organization who seek to take advantage of members."

The plea is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Christopher M. Piehota.

Sentencing is scheduled for April, 19, 2012 at 1:00 p.m. in Buffalo, N.Y. before Judge Arcara.

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