



*United States Attorney  
District of New Jersey*

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**BROWNS MILLS, NEW JERSEY WOMAN CHARGED WITH MAIL FRAUD AND  
IDENTITY THEFT**

CAMDEN, N.J. – A Browns Mills, New Jersey woman who orchestrated a scheme to defraud banks and other financial institutions out of nearly \$200,000 by submitting fraudulent college student loan applications was arrested yesterday on mail fraud and identity theft charges, United States Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

La’Vada D. Cruse, 23, is charged by Criminal Complaint with mail fraud and aggravated identity theft.

According to the Criminal Complaint filed in Camden federal court:

Beginning in December 2003 and continuing through 2007, Cruse applied for 92 student loans in both her name and in the names of individuals whose names, social security numbers and dates of birth Cruse used without their permission. In the 92 student loan applications, Cruse sought in excess of \$1,000,000 in student loans. Cruse successfully obtained 17 student loans and received \$192,000 in student loan proceeds during the course of the scheme.

In the false student loan applications, Cruse stated that she was a full-time student at one of six New Jersey-area colleges, including Burlington County Community College. In many of the loan applications, Cruse included a fake college enrollment letter stating that she was a student at the college. Also included in the loan applications was fraudulent biographical, employment, and financial information for an individual listed as the co-borrower. Cruse also included fraudulent employment letters as well as fake pay stubs and tax forms of the co-borrowers in order to support the loan application.

Cruse also applied for student loans in the names of other individuals too, using their names, social security numbers, and dates of birth without their knowledge or consent. Cruse, however, used her Browns Mills address for these loan applications so the loan proceeds would be forwarded to her.

Once the student loan applications were approved, banks and lending institutions issued checks – some payable for as much as \$22,0000 – directly to Cruse (or a nominee) and the loan’s co-borrower. Cruse then deposited these checks directly into one of bank accounts that she controlled.

The mail fraud charge carries a maximum potential penalty of 30 years of imprisonment

and a \$1 million fine. The aggravated identity theft charge carries a mandatory minimum sentence of two years of imprisonment consecutive to her sentence in connection with the mail fraud charge. In determining an actual sentence, the judge to whom the case is assigned would, upon a conviction, consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited Postal Inspectors of the United States Postal Inspection Service, under the direction of Inspector in Charge Teresa Thome; Special Agents of the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations, Cherry Hill Post of Duty under the direction of Special Agent in Charge William P. Offord; the Medford Police Department, under the direction of Chief Anthony Canale; and the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Robert D. Bernardi, with the investigation leading to the Criminal Complaint.

The Government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew T. Smith of the Criminal Division in Camden.

The charges and allegations contained in the Complaint are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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Defense counsel: Maggie Moy, Esq.