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**FLORIDA WOMAN SENTENCED TO 130 MONTHS IN PRISON
FOR FRAUD SCHEME IN CONNECTION WITH
ADOPTION OF DISABLED CHILDREN**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, ROSE GILL HEARN, the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), and MARK J. MERSHON, the Assistant Director-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), announced that JUDITH LEEKIN was sentenced today to 130 months in prison for defrauding New York State and New York City out of approximately \$1.68 million in adoption subsidies that were intended to provide for the care of eleven adopted children. In addition to the prison term, United States District Judge RICHARD M. BERMAN, who imposed the sentence in Manhattan federal court, ordered LEEKIN to forfeit \$1.68 million, as well as her interests in her homes in Port St. Lucie, Florida, and Sanford, Florida. According to the Information filed in Manhattan federal court and statements and submissions made during and in connection with LEEKIN's guilty plea and sentencing proceedings:

The New York State Adoption Subsidy Program

There are children in the foster care systems of New York State and New York City whose age, background, or physical or mental disability make it more difficult to find adoptive

placements for them. In order to increase the likelihood of these children finding permanent homes, New York State enacted legislation which allows payments to be made for the care and maintenance of adopted children who fit the definition of handicapped or hard-to-place as defined by New York State law and regulations. Monthly subsidy payments are available to all eligible children until the age of 21, regardless of the adoptive parent's income. These payments are discontinued only when it is determined by a social services official that the adoptive parent is no longer legally responsible for the support of the child or that the child is no longer receiving any support from the parent.

The New York City Administration for Children's Services (the "NYC ACS") requests adoptive parents who are receiving adoption subsidies from NYC ACS to submit an annual certification form (the "Certification Form"), accompanied by supporting paperwork, the purpose of which is to determine whether adoptive parents continue to be legally responsible for the support of their adopted children and whether the adoptive parents are still providing support. New York State law requires that adoptive parents notify the State in the event that they either cease to be legally responsible for the child or are no longer providing support, or if the child has died.

LEEKIN's Scheme To Defraud

Between 1988 and 1996, LEEKIN adopted eleven children ("Adopted Children 1-11") -- many of who were physically and/or mentally disabled -- in New York City and maintained custody of a twelfth adopted child ("Adopted Child 12"). LEEKIN misrepresented her identity and living situation to the New York State Office of Children & Family Services ("NYS OCFS") and the NYC ACS in order to adopt Adopted Children 1-11. She used four different, fake names in adopting the children, and misrepresented both how many other children were in her care and the extent of the physical and mental disabilities of those children. Between 1988 and July 18, 2007, based on these misrepresentations, LEEKIN collected approximately \$1.68 million in adoption subsidies, and used the money to support a lavish lifestyle for herself.

In 1997, LEEKIN lived with Adopted Children 1-12 in Queens, New York. During this time, Adopted Children 1-11 lived in the basement of LEEKIN's home and did not go to school or outside. In addition, several of Adopted Children 1-11 were restrained in order to prevent them from getting out of their beds. In 1998, LEEKIN moved with Adopted Children 1-12 from New

York to Port St. Lucie, Florida, and while there, caused Adopted Children 1-11 to live in a similar manner to which they had lived in New York. Between 2004 and July 2007, in Florida, Adopted Children 1-10 slept on the floor of a storage room abutting the garage and typically only entered the house to use the bathroom or the kitchen. In addition, Adopted Children 1-10 did not attend school, and several of the Adopted Children were restrained using plastic ties. Neither the NYS OCFS nor the NYC ACS knew about the manner in which LEEKIN treated Adopted Children 1-11. Had those agencies known how LEEKIN was treating its children, it would have -- among other things -- suspended the adoption subsidy payments.

In order to collect the adoption subsidies for Adopted Children 1-11, LEEKIN submitted Certification Forms containing false information. For example, in 2002, LEEKIN (using the aliases "Eastlyn Giraud" and "Michelle Wells") submitted to the NYC ACS copies of school report cards for seven of the Adopted Children, based on which LEEKIN received adoption subsidies on behalf of those children. The report cards, however, were fraudulent, and Adopted Children 1-11 had never attended the schools reflected on the report cards.

In addition, LEEKIN submitted multiple false Certification Forms for Adopted Child 11. Adopted Child 11 was so severely mentally and physically handicapped that s/he could neither speak nor walk. In 2000, LEEKIN removed Adopted Child 11 from her home, and LEEKIN stopped providing care for Adopted Child 11 altogether. Nevertheless, LEEKIN continued to submit Certification Forms for Adopted Child 11 in which LEEKIN falsely stated that Adopted Child 11 continued to live in LEEKIN's home. LEEKIN continued to collect adoption subsidies for Adopted Child 11 until July 18, 2007, when her scheme was discovered.

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Mr. GARCIA thanked the New York City Department of Investigation for its investigative efforts and for referring the case for prosecution. He also praised the investigative work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

U.S. Attorney MICHAEL J. GARCIA stated: "For almost twenty years, JUDITH LEEKIN manipulated a system intended to protect the welfare of New York City's neediest children. Today, she will begin paying for the years that she spent caring more about the \$1.68 million she stole than she did for the children she was entrusted to protect."

DOI Commissioner ROSE GILL HEARN said: "LEEKIN perverted New York City's adoption subsidy program and in so doing crushed the childhoods of the children she adopted by causing them irreparable pain and suffering, including by keeping the children locked away. We are very satisfied that LEEKIN will be serving this sentence locked away in a penitentiary."

FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge MARK J. MERSHON stated: "JUDITH LEEKIN perpetrated a nearly two decade-long scheme that defrauded the state, the city and their taxpayers of more than a million-and-a-half dollars. That in itself is shameful. The manner in which she did it -- almost literally taking food from the mouths of children -- is reprehensible. Perhaps nothing the FBI does is more fundamentally important than protecting the welfare of children."

This case is being prosecuted by the Office's Public Corruption Unit. Assistant United States Attorney ALEX WILLSCHER is in charge of the prosecution.

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