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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Assisted Living Employees Arrested for Exploitation and Theft



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Following an investigation by Attorney General Ashley Moody's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, Tavetta Lavetta Jones and Tekera Levine were arrested over the weekend on charges related to abuse and exploitation of a senior. As employees of an assisted living facility in Escambia County, Jones and Levine were supposed to transfer the victim to sign bond paperwork. Instead, Jones and Levine, Jones's manager, abandoned the victim on the side of a road and took the victim's identification card and debit card. Jones is charged with exploitation of an elderly person or disabled adult, and criminal use of personal identification information. Levine faces a charge of accessory after the fact.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "The scheme concocted and carried out by these two caregivers is horrifying—the women abused their positions to steal a patient's ID and debit card, then abandoned the senior victim on the side of the road. Thankfully, following an investigation by my Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, these suspects have been arrested and will face serious charges for this criminal scheme."

The MFCU investigation revealed that Jones, an employee of Whispering Pines Assisted Living Facility, abandoned an elderly resident on Antioch Cemetery Road in Walton County on Sept. 3, 2019. The elderly victim identified Jones and Levine as the facility employees who orchestrated the abandonment and identified a black Volkswagen as the vehicle Jones was driving while abandoning the victim. Jones and Levine left the victim without a phone, water, money or identification on a particularly hot day.

Levine, the manager of Whispering Pines, gave varying accounts about the occurrence of the abuse and Jones's involvement. Phone records placed both Jones and Levine in Walton County near the time law enforcement responded to a 911 call by residents on Antioch Cemetery Road. Phone records also place Jones in the vicinity of ATMs where the victim's debit card and personal identification number were used to gain access to the victim's bank account during August and September 2019. Video footage places a black Volkswagen or similar vehicle at the ATMs during the transactions involving the victim's debit card and PIN.

The Escambia County Sheriff's Office arrested Jones on one count of exploitation of an elderly person, a third-degree felony; one count of criminal use of personal identification information of a person over 60 years of age and one count of criminal use of personal identification information over $5,000, both second-degree felonies. If convicted on all counts, Jones faces a possible sentence of up to 35 years in state prison.

ECSO arrested Levine on one count of accessory after the fact, a third-degree felony. If convicted, Levine faces a possible sentence of up to five years in state prison.

The cases will be prosecuted by Assistant Attorney General Christi Hankins of MFCU through an agreement with Ginger Bowden Madden, State Attorney for the First Judicial Circuit of Florida.

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The Florida Medicaid Fraud Control Unit is funded through a grant totaling $26,329,510 for Federal Fiscal Year 2021, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General. The Federal Share of these funds is 75% totaling $19,747,136. The State Matching Share of these funds is 25% totaling $6,582,374 and is funded by Florida.

The Florida Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit investigates and prosecutes providers that intentionally defraud the state's Medicaid program through fraudulent billing practices. Medicaid fraud essentially steals from Florida's taxpayers. From January 2019 to the present, Attorney General Moody's MFCU has obtained more than $70 million in settlements and judgments.