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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Woman Arrested for Stealing Hurricane Insurance Money and Gov. Benefits



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit today announced the arrest of a woman for exploitation of an elderly adult. The arrest follows an investigation by MFCU and the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs that uncovered Billie Jo Ethridge used power of attorney to steal veterans benefits and property insurance money awarded to a senior for home repairs due to damage caused by Hurricane Michael. According to the investigation, over an eight-month period, Ethridge used her position to take more than $63,000 from the senior victim.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "A senior who suffered property damage due to Hurricane Michael trusted the defendant with important financial decisions. Instead of using the insurance payments to repair the victim's home, the defendant stole the money for her own personal use. We will not tolerate the exploitation of our seniors and I am proud of the work of our MFCU investigators, partnering with the VA, to hold this defendant accountable for these despicable actions."

According to the probable cause affidavit, on Nov. 15, 2018, Ethridge deposited two checks totaling more than $20,000 into her own private bank account. Frontline Homeowners Insurance previously issued the checks to the victim for repairs to the victim's home suffered during Hurricane Michael.

The following month, the VA deposited a large lump sum payment into the victim's checking account. The investigation revealed that soon after the deposit, Ethridge began making withdrawals from the victim's account totaling more than $40,000.

Ethridge is charged with one count of exploitation of an elderly adult $50,000 or more, a first-degree felony. If convicted, Ethridge faces up to 30 years in prison and $15,000 in fines. The State Attorney’s Office in the 14th Judicial Circuit will prosecute the case.