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For Immediate Release

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Workforce Services Helps to Bring Down Multi-State Fraudster

Enhanced detection and data analytics for food stamp fraud saving taxpayers' money

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SALT LAKE CITY — The arrest of a Little Rock, Arkansas, woman charged with 17 counts of fraud is the culmination of a multi-state and federal investigation initiated by Utah's Department of Workforce Services Eligibility Services Division.

In early March 2016, the Eligibility Services Division investigations unit and data analytics specialist uncovered an extensive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps) fraud case centered in Arkansas. The team acted quickly to notify Salt Lake City's special agent with the United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General (USDA/OIG), and identified possible suspects and began gathering evidence.

Once a primary suspect was identified, Eligibility Services shared collected evidence in the case to the USDA/OIG to pursue a federal investigation in collaboration with the U.S. Attorney's Office. The work of Utah's investigators ultimately led to the end of this individual committing SNAP fraud in multiple states.

“While SNAP misuse is fortunately not a widespread problem in Utah, we take fraud seriously and aggressively pursue action against anyone abusing the public assistance programs we administer,” said Jon Pierpont, executive director of the Department of Workforce Services. “We are committed to the wise stewardship and integrity of our programs to help ensure that only eligible individuals and families receive the temporary supportive services needed to help them work towards gainful employment and self-sufficiency.”

Beginning in January 2016, the investigations unit expanded their work to include more in-depth research of out-of-state SNAP benefit use and multiple other data elements that indicate misuse, based on the recommendations of the Utah State Auditor's performance audit of the Eligibility Services Division's data analytics techniques to detect SNAP abuse in December 2015.

(more)

“This is a prime example of why we conduct these types of performance audits,” said John Dougall, Utah State Auditor. “I commend Workforce Services for quickly implementing our office’s recommendations to better protect taxpayer’s money. Our auditors are committed to helping state agencies refine and enhance their processes for continuous improvement.”

Eligibility Services employs a variety of tools to ensure efficient and appropriate use of taxpayer dollars for SNAP benefits. Utah’s current accuracy rate in ensuring only eligible individuals are approved for SNAP benefits is 97 percent, higher than the national average. The Eligibility Services investigations unit works to identify and take action on ineligible payment or overpayment fraud and abuse.

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