



Memorandum



Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General
A State of Florida Commission on Law Enforcement Accredited Agency
601 NW 1st Court ♦ South Tower, 22nd Floor ♦ Miami, Florida 33136
Phone: (305) 375-1946 ♦ Fax: (305) 579-2656
Visit our website at: www.miamidadeig.org

To: Nathan Kogon, Director
Department of Housing and Community Development

From: Felix Jimenez, Inspector General 

Date: September 29, 2026

Subject: Plea Entered in Connection with Defrauding Miami-Dade County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program, Ref. IG23-0016-I

On September 23, 2026, Claretha Benjamin pled guilty to a reduced count of Petit Theft, a first-degree misdemeanor in violation of Florida Statute 812.014, in connection with her conduct in a scheme to defraud Miami-Dade County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

The County's ERAP, administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), used federal funding to provide emergency rental assistance to Miami-Dade residents experiencing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The County committed additional funds to expand the program in 2022. Funds awarded under the ERAP were to be used to pay rent and/or utilities. ERAP applicants were required to provide, among other documents and information, an attestation of household income and/or loss, the total of rental arrearages, photo identification, a copy of a lease agreement, and information identifying the landlord.

Following a joint investigation by the Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office (MDSO), and the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office (SAO), Ms. Benjamin was found to have submitted an application to the County's ERAP which was supported by a fraudulent lease, fake pay stubs, and a forged letter that purportedly documented her loss of income. She was awarded \$40,300 that was to be used only for rent and utilities. Instead, Ms. Benjamin converted the funds for personal use and paid kickbacks to co-conspirators.

Ms. Benjamin was adjudicated guilty and paid restitution to the County in the amount of \$40,300. She is set to surrender on October 5, 2026, to serve 75 days in jail. At the time of her surrender, Ms. Benjamin will also pay investigative costs.

The OIG appreciates the assistance of HCD and the OIG's law enforcement partners, the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office and the SAO.