



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FIRST OF SIX CO-DEFENDANTS SENTENCED FOR FOOD STAMP, WIRE FRAUD

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that the first of six co-defendants guilty of food stamp and wire fraud was sentenced today in federal court.

Joseph P. Spino, 50, of Kansas City, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Howard F. Sachs this morning to two years in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered **Spino** to forfeit \$131,442.60 from the sale of his business, which was used to commit food stamp and wire fraud. **Spino** also was ordered to pay restitution in the amount \$349,950.

Spino, the former owner of A&J Liquors and Deli, located in Kansas City, plead guilty to food stamp and wire fraud on Sept. 10, 2002. By pleading guilty, **Spino** admitted that, as owner of A&J Liquors, he defrauded the federal food stamp program by accepting the programs' Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards from customers in exchange for non-qualified purchases and cash. **Spino** pleaded guilty to purchasing the EBT food stamp benefits on three separate occasions. He admitted that he bought food stamps in the amount of \$116.59 on June 21, 2001; \$320.76 on June 27, 2001; and \$261.49 on June 27, 2001. He also admitted to committing wire fraud in order to transfer the EBT benefits electronically on four occasions. He admitted that he fraudulently transferred the benefits in the amount of \$441.02 on Nov. 17, 1999; \$206.20 on Nov. 17, 1999; \$188.83 on June 15, 2001; and \$201.48 on June 15, 2001.

Five employees at A&J Liquors also have been convicted in this case. All six co-defendants were charged in a 31-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury on Jan. 29, 2002, in Kansas City.

Co-defendants **Carmen A. Poeta**, 54, **James K. Williams**, 47, **Carl E. Johnson**, 32, **Lamar E. Dixon**, 46, and **Maurice T. Wheeler**, 49, all of Kansas City, pleaded guilty to their roles in the conspiracy to defraud the federal government's food stamp program but have not yet

been sentenced.

Poeta pleaded guilty to food stamp fraud, admitting that he illegally exchanged \$335.54 in food stamp benefits in return for liquor and cash.

Williams pleaded guilty to food stamp fraud, admitting that he sold cash and liquor in return for food stamp benefits.

Johnson pleaded guilty to food stamp fraud, admitting that he illegally exchanged \$335.54 in food stamp benefits in return for liquor and cash.

Dixon pleaded guilty to wire fraud, admitting that he illegally exchanged \$441.02 in food stamp benefits in return for liquor and cash.

Wheeler pleaded guilty to food stamp fraud, admitting that he illegally exchanged \$320.76 in food stamp benefits in return for liquor and cash.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Bruce E. Clark. It was investigated by the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Internal Revenue Service and the Division of Legal Services for the State of Missouri Division of Social Services.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow