



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, March 11, 2009

*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

For Information Contact Public Affairs
SANDY RAYNOR
Telephone: (602) 514-7625
Cell: (602) 525-2681

FORMER PHOENIX RESIDENT CHARGED AND ARRESTED FOR THEFT OF OVER \$60,000 OF VETERAN'S BENEFITS

PHOENIX - A Phoenix woman has been arrested in Colorado and transferred to Arizona to face theft charges of over \$60,000 from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. A federal grand jury in Phoenix returned a 3-count indictment on December 2, 2008, against Michele Marie Valent, 38, formerly of Phoenix, for two counts of Theft of Government Funds and one count of False Statement. Valent was arrested without incident in Douglas County, Colorado on February 10, 2009, and was detained pending transfer to Arizona. After her transfer today, Valent made her initial appearance in federal court before U.S. Magistrate Judge David K. Duncan. She will be detained in federal custody pending trial, set for May 5, 2009 at 9:00 a.m. in front of U.S. District Judge Neil V. Wake.

The indictment alleges from March 4, 2004 through December 2, 2008, Valent stole approximately \$53,556, by continuing to receive U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Benefits for herself as the unmarried widow of a deceased veteran, even though Valent was no longer eligible for the benefits because she had remarried on March 4, 2004. Valent had been previously married to Arizona Army National Guardsman who was killed during a training exercise at Fort Rucker, Alabama, on December 12, 2002.

The indictment also alleges that from October 1, 2004 through December 2, 2008, Valent stole approximately \$9,804 of additional benefits by receiving VA Dependents Educational Assistance Program benefits for herself by again falsely claiming that she was the unmarried widow of a deceased veteran.

The final count of the indictment alleges that on October 7, 2008, Valent made a false statement on a VA Declaration of Status of Dependents form. On the form she stated that she was a surviving spouse of a deceased veteran, that she had not remarried since the death of her spouse on December 12, 2002, and that she was entitled to continue to receive VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Benefits for herself as a widow of a veteran, even though she was no longer eligible for the benefits because she had remarried.

A conviction for Theft of Government Funds and for a False Statement each carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Wake will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

An indictment is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

-MORE-

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - Office of Inspector General. The prosecution is being handled by Frederick A. Battista, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-08-1418-PHX-NVW

RELEASE NUMBER: 2009-082(Valent)

###

For more information on the U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Arizona, visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/az/>