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Monday, November 28, 2016

## Waterbury Grocery Store Worker Pleads Guilty to Illegal Use of Food Stamp Benefits

Deirdre M. Daly, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, announced that RAUL CARLOS MONARCA-GONZALEZ, 40, of Waterbury, waived his right to indictment and pleaded guilty today in Hartford federal court to one count of unlawful use of food stamp benefits and one count of conspiracy to commit food stamp fraud.

The federal Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program ("SNAP") is administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and utilizes federal tax dollars to subsidize low-income households to provide them with the opportunity to achieve a more nutritious diet by increasing their food-purchasing power. SNAP recipients purchase eligible food items at retail food stores through the use of an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, and SNAP benefits may be accepted by authorized retailers only in exchange for eligible items. Items such as alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, paper goods and soaps are not eligible for purchase with Food Stamp benefits, and it is a violation of the rules and regulations governing the food stamp program to allow benefits to be used to purchase ineligible items. SNAP benefits may not lawfully be exchanged for cash under any circumstances. The program is designed so that the total amount of each purchase is electronically transferred to the retailer's designated bank account.

According to court documents, MONARCA worked at WB Trade Fair Grocery, located at 43 Willow Street in Waterbury. From November 2014 until June 2016, MONARCA and others illegally allowed customers to redeem their food stamp benefits for cash and other ineligible items.

Given the stock of eligible food items at the store, the number of registers and the customer amenities, it is estimated that WB Trade Fair Grocery could lawfully redeem



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at most between \$120,000 to \$240,000 per year in food stamp benefits. However, during this approximately 18-month period, food stamp redemptions at the store totaled approximately \$3.2 million.

MONARCA has been detained since his arrest on August 18, 2016. He is scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Judge Vanessa L. Bryant on March 1, 2017, at which time he faces a maximum term of imprisonment of five years, a fine of up to \$250,000 fine and restitution.

This matter is being investigated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Anastasia King and Neeraj Patel.

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