

Ottawa told to be tougher on fraud

Woman received excessive payments while on welfare

By Andrew Seymour, Ottawa Citizen May 7, 2011

The city should have a better way of monitoring for fraud when doling out welfare cash, an Ottawa judge said Friday before sentencing a woman who admitted to stealing from the system.

"I would have thought after all these years the city would have a more effective way of double-checking," Ontario Court Justice Peter Wright said as he sentenced Sarah Ierullo, 29, to a conditional discharge with a year's probation.

The single mother admitted to defrauding Ontario Works of \$7,656.28 over two years starting in 2005. She pleaded guilty to fraud under \$5,000 after paying back \$2,700.

Ierullo under-reported her income, resulting in higher payments than she was entitled to receive. A caterer, she wasn't caught until someone with the city, which administers the program, noticed a discrepancy in her T4 statement.

"It cuts both ways," said Wright, who was critical of the city process. "She is before the court for her dishonesty. She is also before the court because the city needs to impose better checks and balances."

Crown prosecutor Julien Lalande argued Ierullo's crime was aggravated because it was a theft from the public purse, went on for two years and involved a significant amount of money. Lalande said it was a self-reporting system and that, despite its thorough efforts, the city was forced to rely on the honesty of the recipients of social assistance.

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