

PRESS RELEASE

Former Executive Director of Tribal non-profit job training program pleads guilty to embezzling federal funds

Thursday, October 12, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Washington

Used organizations debit card to incur nearly \$100,000 in personal expenses for clothing, household luxuries, and electronics

Tacoma – The former Executive Director of the Western Washington Indian Employment Training Program (WWIETP) pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in Tacoma to embezzling from a program receiving federal funds, announced Acting U.S. Attorney Tessa M. Gorman. Debbie Rawle, 68, of Tacoma served as Executive Director of the tribally owned non-profit job training program for several years until October 2019. The non-profit is now defunct and no longer receiving any federal funds. Rawle is scheduled to be sentenced by Chief U.S. District Judge David G. Estudillo for the embezzlement of nearly \$100,000 on January 5, 2024.

According to the plea agreement, the job training non-profit received \$698,153 in 2018 and \$703,388 in 2019 to provide employment and training services for eligible tribal members. The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Division of Indian and Native American Programs administers the funds.

In September 2019, the Division of Indian and Native American Programs began investigating questionable expenditures using the debit card of the non-profit training organization at a Macy's store. Rawle provided false and misleading information about the purchases, claiming they were work related. In fact, there were multiple purchases of items for Rawle's own use including a new mattress, sunglasses, and clothing.

Further investigation revealed Rawle used the organization debit card for purchases at Best Buy, Amazon, and Costco. At Costco she purchased a cedar pavilion and above ground swimming pool, while on Amazon she ordered a pool maintenance kit, and motorcycle accessories costing more than \$1,000. In all, the embezzled funds amount to \$99,990.

"The Western Washington Indian Employment and Training Program (WWIETP) provided education, job training, and employment services to Native Americans through grants funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. As Executive Director, Debbie Rawle used her position at the WWIETP to embezzle these funds to personally enrich herself. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to aggressively identify those who commit similar crimes and bring them to justice," said Quentin Heiden, Special Agent-in-Charge, Western Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

Rawle has agreed to pay \$99,990 in restitution. Embezzlement from a program receiving federal funds is punishable by up to ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The actual sentence will be determined by Chief Judge Estudillo who will consider a number of statutory factors before determining the appropriate sentence.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Division of Indian and Native American Programs ("DINAP"). The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney J. Tate London. Mr. London serves as a Tribal Liaison for the U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Washington.

Contact

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Updated October 12, 2023

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