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Two Trenton Men Charged with Stealing Food Stamp Funds

TRENTON – Two Trenton men were arrested Thursday morning and charged with stealing food stamp funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Acting Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri reported.

Francisco Reyes, age 47, and Rafael Fereras, age 52, were each charged with one count of third-degree theft by deception. They were taken into custody Thursday morning in Trenton by detectives with the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and agents with the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as the Food Stamp Program, is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is administered by the States. The program was created to alleviate hunger and malnutrition, and permits low income households to obtain more a nutritious diet by increasing their food purchasing power.

A joint investigation by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Economic Crime Unit and the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Agriculture revealed that Tiburon Supermarket was exchanging cash for customers SNAP credit and retaining up to 50 percent of the proceeds as payment for conducting the transaction. This is one of the more common abuses of SNAP funds. From September 2014 through September 2015, a cooperating witness exchanged a total of \$950 in SNAP benefits for \$475 in cash with Reyes and Fereras at the Tiburon Supermarket. Reyes is the store owner and Fereras is an employee.

Both Reyes and Fereras were released pending future court proceedings. Third-degree charges carry a penalty of three to five years in state prison and a fine of up to \$15,000.

Despite having been charged, every defendant is presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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