



NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Workers' Compensation Fraud Inspector General
Catherine Leahy Scott

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 21, 2015
Contact [John Milgrim](#): 518-474-1010

ELMIRA BARTENDER AND AN AUTO MECHANIC CHARGED WITH OVER \$25,000 COMBINED IN WORKERS' COMPENSATION FRAUD SCHEMES

Arrests Part of an Ongoing Coordinated Effort to Combat Fraud

ELMIRA – New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott today announced the arrests of an Elmira bartender and a self-employed auto mechanic in two separate cases amounting to a combined fraud on the Workers' Compensation system of more than \$25,000.

James Hooks, Jr., 56, of 112 Davis St., Elmira, was charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, Insurance Fraud in the Third Degree, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree and the Workers' Compensation crime of Fraudulent Practices, all felonies. He was accused of collecting \$24,584.60 in Workers' Compensation payments he was not eligible for while also working as a weekend bartender at Ramsey's Place in Elmira.

John L. VanRensselaer, 53, of 203 Birch St., Elmira, was charged with Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree and two counts each of Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree and the Workers' Compensation crime of Fraudulent Practices, all felonies. He was accused of collecting more than \$1,000 in Workers' Compensation benefits he was not entitled to while also working as a self-employed auto mechanic.

"Workers' Compensation coverage is meant to protect employees, but these two individuals allegedly used it to fraudulently enrich themselves," said Inspector General Leahy Scott. "I will continue to use the resources of my office to pursue those who abuses the Workers' Compensation system at the expense of hard-working New Yorkers."

Under State law, employers are required to maintain Workers' Compensation coverage for their employees, and employees are expected to provide truthful information regarding their work activity to insurance carriers and the Workers' Compensation Board during the time they are receiving benefits.

An investigation by Inspector General Leahy Scott found that Hooks, who sustained injuries while working at a grocery store in 1994, repeatedly told his insurance benefits company that he was not employed in any capacity when in fact he was working since at least 2013 as a bartender at Ramsey's Place on East Fifth Street in Elmira.

In a separate investigation, Inspector General Leahy Scott also found that VanRensselaer, who had been receiving Workers' Compensation benefits based on a work-related injury sustained in 1983, falsely represented that he shut down his auto mechanic garage and had been unemployed since 2009 when in fact he working as a self-employed mechanic through at least early 2014. Between September 2013 and February 2014 he allegedly received more than \$1,000 in benefits he was not entitled to.

Today's arrests are part of an ongoing coordinated effort by Inspector General Leahy Scott with local and State law enforcement partners involving multiple investigations across New York. Additional arrests are expected imminently. They also coincide with enhanced outreach efforts, including stakeholder trainings by the Inspector General, to increase public awareness of Workers' Compensation fraud in the State.

Workers' Compensation fraud impacts all New Yorkers, from increased insurance premiums to increased workloads for coworkers and an overall reduction in workforce productivity.

Hooks and VanRensselaer were arraigned on the charges by Elmira City Court Judge Ottavio Campanella and are due back in court Feb. 19, 2016.

Inspector General Leahy Scott thanked Chemung County District Attorney Weeden A. Wetmore and his office for prosecuting this matter, the Elmira Police Department for assisting with the arrest and the New York State Department of Labor, the PMA Companies and the Special Funds Conservation Committee for their assistance with the investigation.

The defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in a court of law.

###

The New York State Office of the Workers' Compensation Fraud Inspector General investigates fraud, abuse and/or illegal acts against the New York State Workers' Compensation system, including fraud by medical service providers, employers seeking to evade appropriate Workers' Compensation charges, and employees who fabricate injuries to fraudulently receive system benefits. Complaints and referrals are kept confidential. We can be reached by calling toll free: 1-800-367-4448, utilizing our online complaint form at <http://www.ig.ny.gov> or sending an email to: inspector.general@ig.ny.gov. You also can write to our office at: Office of the Workers' Compensation Fraud Inspector General, Empire State Plaza, Agency Building 2, 16th Floor, Albany, New York 12223