

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

## **MOTHER AND DAUGHTER CONVICTED OF WELFARE FRAUD FOR USING DECEASED RELATIVE'S EBT CARD**

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Monterey County District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that on July 12 Maria Teresa Luna and Maria Elia Puga De Lopez, both King City residents, pled guilty to misdemeanor welfare fraud. Judge Robert Burlison sentenced each woman to a 3 year term of probation, an order to pay full restitution and 10 days jail with the option to serve their time in the work alternative program.

Pursuant to a "Deceased Match Report" utilized by the Monterey County Department of Social Services, welfare fraud investigators were alerted to recent ongoing purchases with an Electronic Benefits Transaction (EBT) card issued to a man who was reported deceased. Investigators met with De Lopez, age 59, at the recipients reported address. She initially told investigators that she had merely met the benefit recipient, J. Refugio Reyes, at the local hospital. She denied knowing where he lived. Once investigators began questioning the markets where the EBT card was used, De Lopez contacted investigators and admitted that the decedent was her brother-in-law whom she cared for after a hospitalization. She admitted to using his EBT card for several months following his death. De Lopez's daughter Maria Luna, age 36, also admitted to using the EBT card in the months following Reyes' death. The amount of loss was \$755.23.

It is illegal to use benefits belonging to another or benefits obtained using misrepresentations. Monterey County Department of Social Services along with Monterey County District Attorney's Office has a Welfare Fraud tip line. If you have information regarding welfare fraud you can leave an anonymous tip at (831)755-3224.

Monterey County District Attorney Investigative Aide Quetzal Rodriguez investigated this case.