

## Henderson Non-Profit Director Sentenced To Prison After Pleading Guilty To Theft Of Federal Funds

By Administrator

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United States District Judge James C. Dever III sentenced Comuls Latezes Bridges, 41, of Douglasville, Georgia to 15 months imprisonment, followed by 3 years of supervised release and was ordered to pay \$209,877 in restitution. On July 10, 2019, Bridges pled guilty to theft of federal childcare and adult food program funds. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal program that, among other things, is designed to provide food assistance to young children in out-of-home care. The At-Risk Afterschool Meals (ARAM) component of CACFP offers federal funding to qualifying afterschool programs that serve meals and snacks to children in low-income areas.

BRIDGES was the director of Beyond the Barriers Outreach, Inc. ("BTBO"), a not-for-profit organization headquartered in Henderson, North Carolina. In 2012, BTBO, through BRIDGES, applied for and was approved to participate in the ARAM component of CACFP. BTBO was authorized to receive reimbursement for afterschool meals and snacks that BRIDGES claimed would be served to school-aged students at its afterschool center located in Henderson.

BTBO participated in CACFP from January 2013 to April 2016. During this period, BRIDGES submitted monthly claims for reimbursement for daily meals and snacks purportedly served to as many as 90 students at its Henderson afterschool center. However, the investigation revealed that BRIDGES' claims were false. Soon after BTBO was approved by CACFP, BRIDGES moved to Georgia and did not operate an afterschool program in Henderson. Due to BRIDGES' non-payment of utility bills, the afterschool center was without electricity, gas, and water/sewer services most of the time period during which BRIDGES claimed to operate an afterschool program.

As a result of the fraud, BRIDGES received \$209,887 in unauthorized payments. Most of the fraudulently obtained funds were diverted to BRIDGES' personal expenses in Georgia, such as restaurants, gas, apartment lease, cell phone bill, beauty supplies, massages, and payments associated with a Chapter 13 bankruptcy proceeding.

The United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General conducted the investigation. Assistant United States Attorney Toby Lathan represented the government.