

# **Woman Sentenced to 45 Months Imprisonment for Theft from Metro East Charity, Identity Theft**

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**EAST ST. LOUIS – U.S. Attorney Rachelle Aud Crowe announced today that Kenesha Burlison, 40, of St. Louis, Missouri, was sentenced to 45 months in prison in connection with her theft from her former employer, an East St. Louis charity, and aggravated identity theft.**

Burlison served as the Director of Human Relations for Call for Help, Inc. from 2016 until her termination in 2020. Call for Help is a longstanding charitable organization in East St. Louis, that helps people overcome a variety of personal crises, ranging from sexual assault and poverty to homelessness and mental health issues.

“Kenesha Burlison’s theft from Call for Help is particularly egregious in light of the essential, lifesaving services that the organization provides to communities in Southern Illinois,” United States Attorney Rachelle Aud Crowe said. “We are proud to have organizations like Call for Help in our District and will continue to hold those who steal from them accountable for their actions.”

The organization receives federal funds annually to assist in carrying out its mission. At the time of her guilty plea, Burlison admitted that she fraudulently obtained a cashier’s check from Call for Help in the amount of \$69,788.62, which she used to pay the down payment for a home she was purchasing. Burlison told Call for Help that she needed a cashier’s check to provide to the title company and claimed that she couldn’t get one from her bank because it was closed.

In exchange for the cashier’s check, Burlison provided Call for Help with a personal check in the amount of \$70,000. That check, as well as two others provided by Burlison in the coming months, bounced for insufficient funds. Following her termination from the organization, Call for Help discovered that Burlison had also fraudulently submitted requests for reimbursements that she was not entitled to. Burlison abused her access to the company’s payroll system to fraudulently submit and approve mileage reimbursements and costs for diversity and inclusion trainings that she did not attend. In all, Burlison was paid more than \$115,000 from these fraudulent reimbursements.

“Nonprofits elect a board of directors to provide oversight regarding fiduciary, legal and ethical responsibilities for the organization,” said FBI Springfield Field Office Special Agent in Charge David Nanz. “In this case, Call for Help’s board of directors did exactly what they were put in place to do. Their oversight enabled the FBI to pursue an investigation into the criminal actions of Kenesha Burlison and prevent further harm to the organization’s reputation and financial resources. The FBI is committed to investigating public corruption in any form and at all levels.”

Burlison was also sentenced for aggravated identity theft. In 2020, Burlison submitted an inflated income verification as part of an application for a home mortgage. Because the verification required a signature on behalf of Call for Help, Burlison forged the signature of the organization’s Director of Quality Assurance.

Aggravated identity theft carries a mandatory sentence of two years in prison, which must run consecutive to any other sentence imposed.

In total, Burlison was sentenced to 45 months in prison.

She was also ordered to pay over \$185,000 in restitution to Call for Help, a \$200 special assessment, and will spend three years on supervised release following her term of imprisonment. The investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Springfield Field Office. Assistant United States Attorney Zoe J. Gross prosecuted the case