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FORMER MERRILLVILLE FBI EVIDENCE TECHNICIAN SENTENCED TO 15 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR LYING ABOUT STEALING NEARLY \$80,000

HAMMOND, Ind. — A former employee at the FBI office in Merrillville was sentenced today to 15 months in federal prison for lying about stealing nearly \$80,000 in evidence that she kept for herself instead of properly returning various amounts of cash as she claimed to have done. The defendant, **Melissa L. Sims**, who worked as an evidence control technician for the FBI in Merrillville from 1996 to September 2008, was also ordered to pay \$77,882 in restitution as part of her sentence, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

Sims, 37, of Lowell, Ind., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Philip P. Simon in Federal Court in Hammond. She was ordered to begin serving her sentence on Nov. 28, 2011. The case was investigated by the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Chicago is handling the prosecution in the Northern District of Indiana.

Sims pleaded guilty on Feb. 15, 2011, to making false statements to FBI agents conducting an investigation. According to a written plea agreement, between 2005 and August 2008, Sims stole or embezzled nearly \$80,000 in evidence that she was responsible for disposing of in accord with FBI rules and procedures. Instead of contacting certain individuals to whom the various amounts

of cash were supposed to have been returned, she kept the evidence for herself. On at least 10 different dates, Sims signed 16 separate forms stating that various amounts of cash evidence, ranging from \$2 to \$2,790, had been “released” or “returned,” when she had actually taken the money for herself.

As part of the plea agreement, Sims also acknowledged that in May 2010, she tampered with a witness by attempting to persuade the witness to provide false information to federal agents relating to financial transactions between Sims and the witness. At the time, investigators were probing the source of more than \$80,000 in cash deposits to Sims’ bank account between 2005 and 2008.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark E. Schneider.

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