

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of Montana

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**Former executive director of Montana Native Women's
Coalition admits stealing federal funds**

BILLINGS — The former executive director of the Montana Native Women's Coalition today admitted stealing federal funds for an unapproved trip to Las Vegas, Nevada, Acting U.S. Attorney Leif Johnson said.

Sheryl Lynn Lawrence, 44, of Colstrip, pleaded guilty to theft of federal funds. Lawrence was the executive director of the Montana Native Women's Coalition. Lawrence faces a maximum 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and three years of supervised release.

U.S. District Judge Susan P. Watters presided. Judge Watters continued Lawrence's release pending further proceedings. Sentencing was set for June 3.

The prosecution said in court documents that the purpose of the Lame Deer-based Coalition is to help Native American victims of domestic and sexual violence. The Coalition receives funding from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), which provides grants for victim services.

While serving as the Coalition's executive director, Lawrence received a travel advance in November 2017. Lawrence claimed \$1,826 in travel money for a trip to Las Vegas. Lawrence claimed she drove, which provided more money due to payment for mileage, when in fact, Lawrence flew, which cost significantly less money than if driving. Lawrence spent money on a trip to Las Vegas, which was never approved by the OVW, nor would it ever have been approved.

Lawrence's actions intentionally deprived OVW from using the federal funds for their intended purpose to help Native American victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Lawrence's co-defendant, Barbara Mary Daychief of Browning, pleaded guilty to theft of federal funds on Jan. 22, 2021 and is pending sentencing. A third co-defendant, Meredith McConnell of Colstrip, has pleaded not guilty to charges.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ryan Weldon and Bryan Dake are prosecuting the case, which was investigated by the Department of Justice's Office of the Inspector General.

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