

Department of Justice
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Southern District of Ohio

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Former bookkeeper of federally funded Washington Court House domestic violence shelter pleads guilty to misusing shelter funds for personal expenses

CINCINNATI – The former bookkeeper of My Sister's House, a now-shuttered domestic violence shelter in Washington Court House, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court today to two counts related to stealing funds from the federally funded shelter.

Jaime Cardinal, 45, of Washington Court House, was arrested in July 2020, along with Crystal Chrisman, 53, of Columbus, the former executive director of the shelter.

Cardinal admitted that she and Chrisman spent tens of thousands of dollars intended for the operation of the shelter on personal expenses, including food, a trip to Disney World and Universal Studios for the defendants' daughters, and thousands of dollars in purchases from Avon, Thirty-One and iTunes.

Cardinal's plea details that, between January 2014 and October 2016, she misused debit cards connected to the shelter's bank accounts to make hundreds of personal purchases at restaurants, auctions, craft stores and bowling alleys, among other places – including purchases made when few, if any, victims were living at the shelter. For example, in March and April 2016, when no victims were in the shelter, Cardinal and Chrisman charged more than \$6,000 to the shelter's debit cards for food at restaurants and grocery stores, car repair and fuel for personal cars, weight-loss supplements, and other personal expenses.

Due to the thefts, which totaled more than \$50,000, My Sister's House fell behind on payroll and on paying taxes. In November 2016, the shelter's board placed all employees on administrative leave pending investigation. The domestic violence shelter never reopened.

Cardinal faces a prison sentence of up to five years in prison for conspiring to commit theft and up to 10 years in prison for committing theft concerning programs receiving federal funds. Sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the Court based on the advisory sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors. Under the plea agreement, Cardinal has agreed to pay \$25,000 in restitution.

My Sister's House received more than \$10,000 annually in federal grant funds, including grants under the Violence Against Women Act, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act and the Victims of Crime Act. The grants are intended to be used to pay for salaries and benefits of staff and for shelter operations, including supplies and shelter maintenance.

Vipal J. Patel, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, and the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General announced the plea entered into today before U.S. District Judge Matthew W. McFarland. Assistant United States Attorney Julie D. Garcia is representing the United States in this case.

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