

The Miami Herald

Posted on Friday, 04.29.11

Former Miami city employee charged with stealing federal grant money

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A former city of Miami administrator who ran a disaster readiness program for the poor and elderly and single-mother households was charged Friday with stealing about \$22,000 in federal grants.

Chante Sweet, who ran the Miami AmeriCorps Community Emergency Support program, was accused of writing checks to three purported employees who did not work for the program. Two of those people, Simone West and Ashley Rolle, were also charged with theft of government funds.

If convicted, each of the three defendants faces up to 10 years in prison.

Sweet, arrested early Friday, was granted a \$50,000 personal surety bond in Miami federal court. Her attorney, Richard Tandler, declined to comment.

In 2007, the city was granted federal funding totaling about \$340,000 to hire nine full-time AmeriCorps members for a three-year period. Sweet was placed in charge of the program, including hiring and paying employees.

The FBI-led investigation found that Sweet issued checks to a purported employee identified as "B.R.," totaling \$2,529.13 between 2008 and 2009, according to the indictment. But Sweet allegedly cashed the checks herself. "B.R." did not work for the ACES program, and was not aware that Sweet made out the checks payable to him.

Sweet also authorized check payments totaling \$9,799.80 to West and 9,603.50 to Rolle, both of whom cashed the checks and shared the money with the ACES administrator, the indictment said.

According to city records, Sweet joined the administration of former Mayor Manny Diaz in 2006. She earned a salary of \$69,176 and stopped working for the city in summer 2010.