



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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PRESS RELEASE

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Post Office and Identity Thief Pleads Guilty in Court

A Chico woman admitted in court yesterday to committing large-scale identity and mail theft, as well as to burglarizing a local post office.

Carolyn Gene Hill, 45, of Chico, pleaded guilty in Butte County Superior Court on Wednesday to 11 felony charges relating to identity theft and burglary of the Durham Post Office.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the investigation began in August of 2020 when BCSO deputies responded to a reported break-in at the Durham Post Office. Numerous mailboxes had been pried open, and a large amount of mail was stolen. There was no suspect at that time.

Ramsey said that while the burglary investigation was progressing, Hill became a suspect in a separate theft that had occurred at a Chico drug treatment center where Hill was working as a counselor. While conducting follow up into that case in December of 2020, a Butte County sheriff's deputy noticed Hill sitting in her car outside a storage unit, with a meth pipe next to her. She was arrested and the car and storage unit were searched and found to contain hundreds of pieces of "personal identifying information" belonging to dozens of other people, including victims of the Durham post office theft. Ramsey said the items included stolen checks, driver's licenses, account statements, credit and debit cards, tax information, as well as dozens of social security numbers along with names and dates of birth written on sheets of paper.

Ramsey said sheriff's deputies then undertook the laborious task of carefully documenting each of the hundreds of stolen items that were recovered, and matching them up to the victims. Deputies contacted the dozens of victims and confirmed they had all been victims of identity theft and they did not know Hill or give her permission to have their personal information.

While the investigation was being completed, Ramsey said a victim of the post office theft noticed an unusual transaction on their bank account. The victim found a check made out to "Carol Hill", which had been cashed in Red Bluff. The victim contacted the Red Bluff Police, who managed to get surveillance of Hill cashing the stolen check. The victim also contacted the Butte County Sheriff's Office, who were then able to connect Hill to the post office burglary.

Hill was interviewed and ultimately admitted to conspiring with another individual to burglarize the post office, while she acted as the “getaway” driver.

Ramsey said that in total, sheriff’s deputies were able to identify over 75 confirmed victims of identity theft in this case. Hill was in possession of over \$200,000.00 in stolen checks. Particularly disturbing, said Ramsey, was the fact that a number of the victims were clients of the drug rehab center where Hill had been working, and that Hill had accessed their personal files in order to steal from them.

Ramsey said that mail and identity theft is rampant throughout our community as it is in the rest of the state, and emphasized the importance of residents paying close attention to things like bank statements and credit reports for suspicious activity. Ramsey said people should report suspected fraud to their local law enforcement agency or to the Butte County District Attorney’s Fraud Hotline at 1-866-DA FRAUD (1-866-323-7283) or DAFraud@buttecounty.net.

Hill will be sentenced in court on August 25, 2020, where she will face up to 9 years 4 months in jail. She will also be responsible for restitution to her victims.

