



# Canada Court Watch Report



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## York Region CAS worker BUSTED!

### CAS supervisor charged for stealing child's Easter gifts

By Mike March, Justice Reporter

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Most readers have seen on TV the story about the Grinch who stole Christmas, but it seems that a former worker with the York Region CAS may earn the distinction of being labelled as the Grinch who stole Easter.

A mother whose child is in the care of the York Region Children's Aid Society reported to Court Watch that a supervisor with the York Region CAS, Ms. Donna Lennon, was arrested on Friday and charged by York Regional police for stealing her child's Easter presents.

Ms. Lennon was the child's worker and according to the mother also a supervisor with the York CAS with over 20 years service in the child protection industry.

York Regional Police advised Court Watch that Ms. Lennon will be brought before the Newmarket criminal court on July 6, 2006 to face the charges.

For the purposes of protecting the identity of the child, the mother's name and the name of the child involved have not been mentioned in this article.

The mother alleged that Ms. Lennon stole money and gifts which were given by her to the York CAS to be delivered to her son in care.

The mother's Easter present to her son consisted of a debit card with a bit of spending money credited to it, some small toys and some Easter chocolate.

The PIN number of the debit card was included in the package so that the boy could withdraw his spending money at his own leisure.

After Easter, however, the mother found out that her son had not received his gift and that he was very distraught over this.

The boy's case worker, Ms. Lennon, never delivered boy the gifts that his mother had delivered to the York CAS offices.

Upon further investigation, the mother

discovered that the money which she had credited on her son's debit card had been withdrawn from a bank machine and it was not her son who had withdrawn it.

Sensing that something was terribly wrong, the mother next tried to get some answers through the York CAS offices, however, she was given the run around as well by agency staff.

The Director would not speak to her and referred her back to less ranking workers.

Citing reasons of confidentiality, nobody at the agency would give her any answers. She was told that she could file a complaint if she wanted.

Seeing as the York Region CAS was not going to cooperate in the matter, she decided to call the police for help.

According to the mother, the police traced the withdrawal from the debit card back to Ms. Lennon from a photo that was taken by the bank machine where the withdrawal from the boy's card was made.

Faced with the embarrassing proof that it was their own CAS worker who had taken the boy's money, the York Region CAS kept the bank card but gave the boy back his money in cash although nothing was ever confirmed officially by the agency.

The other items, including the chocolate and toys appeared to have disappeared and were never recovered. About 75% of the items were recovered with the mother having to repurchase those items which were still missing.

The mother told Court Watch that police were originally not going to charge the worker because the money was eventually returned.

It was felt by the mother that the York Region CAS were not sincere about giving the boy back his money but only returned the money in an attempt to hush things up while the agency maintained a wall of silence.

The mother felt that to let the worker off the hook was not the right thing to do and that this

worker should be accountable.

"If it had of been me or another person from the community who had committed this terrible crime, you can be sure that we would have been arrested and charged," said the mother.

"Why should these CAS workers get special treatment," she went on to say.

The mother faxed a letter to the York Regional Police requesting that police charge the worker and to make the worker answer to the allegations.

Within a day of sending out her letter, the mother advised by police that they would be laying charges in the matter.

"The police officer who has been involved has been very helpful, but I certainly cannot say that for anyone with the York Region CAS" said the mother.

"My son and I feel better now knowing that this CAS worker will be held accountable."

The mother said that she felt that this incident was likely not the only time this worker had stolen from children under her care and wondered how many other children and families may have been affected as a result of the actions of this CAS worker.

During this whole ordeal, the mother said that it was impossible to get any real help or information from the York Region CAS staff.

Every effort she made to get information was blocked by workers at the agency in what the mother believed was an attempt to cover-up misdeeds by the supervisor in order to protect the agency from bad press.

Even after police finally said that they would lay charges, it took them several days to locate Ms. Lennon because workers with the York Region CAS were less than cooperative in providing information that would assist police to locate Ms. Lennon.

"It really bothers me how administration at York Region CAS never really took an interest in dealing with the theft," said the mother.

"When I called the agency to report that my son's money had been stolen, workers at the agency told me to line up and file a complaint. Everyone knows how long the complaint process takes," she said.

The mother said that the York Region CAS was totally uncooperative at every turn. To this day, the mother said that the agency has never formally acknowledged or apologized for the theft.

She feels that the least the director of the agency should have done was to write a letter to formally acknowledge the incident and to provide

some reassurance that steps have been taken to ensure that this sort of thing does not happen again.

"Instead of apologising, they tried to hide the problem," said the mother.

If the York CAS agency had been more cooperative instead of trying to give me the cold shoulder in the beginning, matters would not likely have escalated to this point," .she said.

I want to see that this sort of crime never happens to another child in their care.

Court Watch has interviewed other children on videotape who have also said that they do not like dealing with the York Region CAS.

Children have reported that they do not trust York Region CAS workers and that workers did not seem to want to listen.

Last year, Court Watch interviewed a number of children, including teens who reported how the York Region CAS were trying to force them to live with their mother even after they had reported to CAS workers that their mother was physically and emotionally abusing them. Ms. Lennon was involved in that case as well.

In fact, according to the teens, workers with the York Region CAS put their support behind their abusive and manipulative mother and that actions of workers and lawyers with the York Region and Simcoe County CAS agencies have caused irreparable harm to their family.

Those teens say they plan to launch against CAS workers and the York Region CAS.

Anyone having dealings with Ms. Donna Lennon or with the York Region CAS are asked to contact Canada Court Watch by phone at (416) 410-4115 or by e mail to relate their experiences.

Many claim that the problem of abuse of children and families by over-zealous and unaccountable workers has become a widespread problem across the Province of Ontario with CAS agencies.

The Province's Ombudsman, Andre Marin, has tried for some time to bring CAS agencies under his scrutiny but so far has been met with only opposition by CAS agencies.

With children dying in care of CAS agencies and many children and parents telling of horror stories of corruption and incompetence by CAS workers and agencies, it is time that the veil of secrecy surrounding CAS agencies be lifted.

It's time for Ontario's Ombudsman to be given full and unrestricted authority to investigate CAS agencies without any further delay.