

Wealthy Couple Fined for Scamming MassHealth
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By Dave Wedge - May 19, 2009

Joseph Youshaei owned 19 businesses and properties, from commercial office space in Downtown Crossing to their local Honey Dew Donut franchises. He drove a Mercedes and lived in a \$650,000 Chestnut Hill house with his wife, Jila, and three children, whom the couple sent to a pricey private school.

Yet the couple claimed just \$475 weekly income from 1999 to 2005, an amount that allowed them to collect Medicaid benefits under MassHealth.

The Youshaeis pleaded guilty Monday in Suffolk Superior Court to charges of fraud and larceny for illegally obtaining those health benefits, according to a statement from the state auditor's office.

"This is truly an unbelievable example of fraud," said state auditor Joe DeNucci in a statement. "A wealthy family that could afford to pay for its own health insurance took money from a taxpayer-funded program meant to help those people who are truly needy and cannot afford health insurance."

Judge Carol Ball ordered the Youshaeis to pay restitution of \$53,114 and fined them \$17,500 each. Joseph Youshaei, 47, was sentenced to one year in the House of Correction; he will be incarcerated for 30 days, starting June 22, and will remain on probation for one year. Jila Youshaei, 42, was sentenced to one-year probation.

Attorney General Martha Coakley prosecuted the case after an initial investigation by DeNucci.

The phone was unanswered this afternoon at the Youshaei's home in Chestnut Hill and at the office of Joseph Youshaei's attorney, William E. Gens. In November, Gens told the Globe that his clients were never as wealthy as prosecutors alleged.

"With regard to the issue of their wealth, that is perhaps quite a bit overblown," Gens said after the couple's arraignment. "The Youshaeis had a number of business interests, but many of them have been failures, and many of them are no longer in existence.

Jila Youshaei's attorney, William Cintolo, said he and his client agreed it would be a "wise decision under the circumstances" to plead guilty. He did not describe his client's mental state or reactions to today's sentencing.

"I thought it was a relatively fair sentence under the circumstances," Cintolo said.