

JERSEY / JUDGMENT

The Attorney General v Laura Jayne Turner

COURT

Royal Court

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Inferior Number Sentencing – fraud.**[2012]JRC147****Royal Court****(Samedi)****3 August 2012**

Before :

W. J. Bailhache, Q.C., Deputy Bailiff, and

Jurats Clapham and Le Breton.

The Attorney General

-v-

Laura Jayne Turner

Sentencing by the Inferior

Number of the Royal Court, following a guilty plea to the following charges:

1 count of:

Failing to notify a change of circumstances

to the Social Security Department, contrary to Article 16(c) of the Income Support (Jersey) Law 2007 (Count 1).

1 count of:

Knowingly furnishing false information to

the Social Security Department with intent to obtain an award, contrary to Article 16(a) of the Income Support (Jersey) Law 2007 (Count 2).

1 count of :

Obtaining an award of Income Support knowing

that it was not properly payable, contrary to Article 16(b) of the Income Support (Jersey) Law 2007 (Count 3).

Age: 28.

Plea: Guilty.

Details of Offence:	The defendant was a full-time carer for three children, claiming income support. In November 2010 her partner moved into her flat. She failed to notify the Department (Count 1) and they co-habited until detection in September 2011. Because of his income she was not entitled to almost all of the benefits she claimed thereafter. The total sum over-claimed was £14,355.76 (Count 3). She avoided and misled (Count 2) the investigating officer. She had recently been advised and warned twice by the Department, following two previous over-claims by her (of £130 and £4,750), which had been dealt with as civil matters. Faced with strong evidence she attended an interview and admitted her deception. The very same day she cashed her final social security cheque, knowing she was not entitled to it. In interview she gave as reasons for lying, her own and her daughter's illness and claimed to have other matters on her mind. She admitted that she knew at the time that her partner's income made her entire claim fraudulent. She had made no repayments and had not responded to the Department's correspondence seeking dialogue about repayment.
Details of Mitigation:	Guilty plea; good character; claimed remorse; low risk of reoffending; social enquiry report referred to difficult upbringing. Carer for three children. Defence counsel referred to lack of financial support from fathers of the children.
Previous Convictions:	None.
Conclusions:	
Count 1:	210 hours' Community Service Order (equivalent of 15 months' imprisonment).
Count 2:	210 hours' Community Service Order (equivalent of 15 months' imprisonment), concurrent.
Count 3:	210 hours' Community Service Order (equivalent of 15 months' imprisonment), concurrent. Total: 210 hours' Community Service Order. Compensation Order in the sum of £14,355.76 sought.

**Sentence and
Observations of Court:**

The Court was not satisfied that the defendant showed any real remorse or that her case was one of desperate need. The offences represented deliberate theft from the taxpayer and an insult to those who make contributions and use the system honestly.

The Court gave serious consideration to a custodial sentence but imposed community service in the particular circumstances of her three children. It was emphasised that notwithstanding any impact on the children, a custodial sentence might well be imposed in other cases involving fraudulent mothers.

Benefit frauds would not be tolerated.

Conclusions granted.

Repayment to begin in 12 months' time to enable the community service to be carried out beforehand.

Compensation Order to be paid at not less than £50 starting from 1st August 2013. Full payment by 2016 or 9 months' imprisonment in default.

D. J. Hopwood, Esq., Crown Advocate.
Advocate C. M. Fogarty for the Defendant.

JUDGMENT

THE DEPUTY BAILIFF: 1. You are here to be sentenced on 3 counts of offences created under the Income Support (Jersey) Law 2007; failing to notify changes of circumstances; knowingly furnishing false information, and obtaining an award of income support. The total that was obtained was £14,355.76 although the Court has been told of two previous occasions where you have obtained money from the Social Security Department which you ought not to have obtained. That is relevant not because you are being sentenced for those offences but it is relevant to the question of your own state of mind at the time these offences were committed. 2. The offences carry a maximum sentence of imprisonment of 7 years or a fine. That shows the degree of seriousness which the legislature accords to benefit fraud, and the Court has been considering sentence for quite a long time because it has to have regard to the seriousness which the legislature approaches this nature of offending. 3. We have read the papers carefully and we are not really satisfied that there is any significant evidence of remorse on your part in this case and we certainly are not satisfied that this is one of those cases of desperate need which sometimes we see in this Court. We accept that the money may not have been spent on luxuries but it is not a case of desperate need. You have quite deliberately stolen money from the taxpayer. Services and benefits from the States do not come for free. Theft of this money, for that is what it is, is an insult to those who make substantial contributions in tax and social security contributions, without complaint, in the knowledge that in our democracy proper provision is made for those who are in genuine need. Theft of this money is also an insult to the many people who are not well off and who struggle on day by day doing without luxuries but acting honestly and not making claims

which they are not entitled to make. You have deliberately made these claims, knowing that you were not entitled to make them. 4. We have considered very carefully whether or not a custodial sentence should be imposed, having regard to what the legislature provides, but in the event we are going to impose community service, largely because of the interests of the three children who live with you. However, I do wish to add that the existence of those children is not such that we would not have been able to impose a custodial sentence, and there will be cases where, despite the impact on children, a custodial sentence might be imposed. People should think about their children before they commit the offences and consider the effect that those offences might have on those children. 5. In this case we are not going to impose a custodial sentence. We are going to impose 210 hours community service on each count to run concurrently, with a default sentence of 15 months' imprisonment on each count. That means that you have a total of 210 hours community service to do. If you do not do it, if there is any problem in doing it and it is referred back to us by the community service authorities, then the Court will consider very carefully whether the default sentence of 15 months imprisonment should be imposed. 6. Now for all the reasons which I have already given, the Court has absolutely no doubt at all that you should pay this money back. The Compensation Order Provisions are to be found in the Criminal Justice (Compensation Orders)(Jersey) Law 1994 and under Article 3 (5) of the Law we are to have regard to the person's means so far as they appear, or are made known to the Court. Unfortunately we do not have very much information about your means, mainly because you have not engaged with the Social Security Department or with the prosecuting authorities when asked to make arrangements for repayment. However you should not have the benefit of your failure to engage and cooperate with them, and therefore we are going to make a Compensation Order for the full amount, £14,355.76. You are to repay it at a rate of not less than £50 per week, starting on 1st August, 2013. We have put it back to the 1st August, 2013, because we anticipate that you will have to do your community service and therefore we wish to give you a chance to get yourself organised and to get employment. If you get employment and at the same time are able to do community service then you should start saving because the full amount has to be paid back by 31st July, 2016, that is four years from now. And if it is not repaid by then the Court imposes a default sentence of 9 months' imprisonment. 7. Now there is a power as your counsel will tell you under the Criminal Justice (Compensation Orders)(Jersey) Law 1994 for a Court to review a Compensation Order. We acknowledge, we appreciate, that we have not had full details of your means and therefore if you cannot meet the terms of repaying the money as I have indicated, then it will be down to you to make your application to the Court to have the Order reviewed because if you do not have it reviewed and fail to make the payments, then you are liable to go to prison for 9 months. 8. In the case of the AG-v-Whelan [2011] JRC 159A the Bailiff said to the defendant in that case:- "You have been at risk of a prison sentence because the Court wishes to send out a message that those who defraud the community by obtaining income support or other benefits by telling lies are at risk of a prison sentence." This Court entirely endorses what the Court said on that occasion and wishes to emphasise, and no doubt the media will give it appropriate publicity, that offences of this kind are absolutely not going to be tolerated by the Courts of this Island. Authorities Income Support (Jersey) Law 2007. Criminal Justice (Compensation Orders)(Jersey) Law 1994. AG-v-Whelan

[2011] JRC 159A. AG-v-Morin

[2010] JRC 217D. R-v-Graham and Whatley [2004] EWCA Crim 2755. AG-v-Gallagher

[2011] JRC 129. AG-v-Duchesne

[2012] JRC 063.

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Prepared on 23 October 2026 · Esheria