

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

STATE OF MARYLAND

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V.

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CASE NO.: C-02-CR-25-000089

ESTHER DIKONGUE-BAYIGHOMOG

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CRIMINAL INFORMATION

THE STATE PROSECUTOR for the State of Maryland, informs and charges ESTHER DIKONGUE-BAYIGHOMOG with having committed the following offenses:

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

At all times relevant to this Criminal Information:

1. ESTHER DIKONGUE-BAYIGHOMOG (“DIKONGUE”) was a legislative aide employed by the Legislative Office of Senator A from Fall 2019 until March 17, 2023.

A. Maryland Senatorial Scholarship

2. The Maryland Senatorial Scholarship is offered to Maryland residents who plan to pursue a postsecondary education at qualifying colleges. The scholarships are offered and awarded through legislative delegations by specific districts.

3. Maryland State Senators are provided a budget for Maryland Senatorial Scholarships annually. Each Senator had discretion to determine selection criteria for student award recipients, and the division of scholarship amounts among awarded students.

4. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (“MHEC”) facilitates the disbursements of scholarships to the scholarship recipients. The MHEC website instructs students to complete and file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (“FAFSA”), and if students are eligible for in-state tuition, but ineligible to receive federal financial aid, they must submit the

MHEC “One-App” to determine eligibility for state grants and scholarships. This application may be completed online through the Maryland College Aid Processing System (“MDCAPS”).

5. If a State Senator distributes their own awards, MHEC advises the student applicant to contact or write to their Senator for further instructions.

6. Senator A created a Scholarship Committee comprised of community volunteers. The Scholarship Committee’s role is to review scholarship applications and to make recommendations to Senator A regarding student awards.

7. Senator A’s Office receives scholarship applications via email, and the Senator’s staff is responsible for administratively coordinating with the Scholarship Committee, as well as communicating with student applicants and MHEC.

8. To qualify for a Maryland Senatorial Scholarship from Senator A, a student must reside in Senator A’s legislative district and must either attend a Maryland college or provide documentation that an out-of-State school offers a qualifying unique major not available through a Maryland school. Students must also write an essay that responds to questions provided by Senator A.

9. All students are required to follow the application process to be considered for the Maryland Senatorial Scholarship award from Senator A.

10. Once the scholarship award is made to a student, MHEC automatically renews the same amount for subsequent school terms until the student obtains their degree.

11. Senator A’s average award amounts range from \$500 to \$1,500 per student; Senator A awards over \$1,500 only under rare circumstances.

B. DIKONGUE’s Employment with Senator A

12. While employed by Senator A, DIKONGUE’s responsibilities included, but were

not limited to, checking and monitoring Senator A's email account and administering, monitoring, and interacting with the Scholarship Committee. As a staff member, DIKONGUE was provided with the password for Senator A's senatorial email account. DIKONGUE was allowed to respond to Senator A's official emails, but only using her own signature line.

13. Senator A entrusted DIKONGUE, as with all staff members, to make accurate and honest representations to MHEC regarding student scholarship awards, and to assist only students recommended by the Scholarship Committee and chosen by Senator A with the receipt of scholarship funds.

14. Once the Committee selects a student candidate for a scholarship award, Senator A's staff is responsible for communicating the student's assigned MHEC ID number and awarded amount of the scholarship funds to MHEC.

15. DIKONGUE established an account through MDCAPS in her own name and in her personal capacity. MDCAPS assigned to DIKONGUE a unique student ID number.

16. DIKONGUE also applied for a "unique major" through MHEC for her Master's Program., which was approved by MHEC as a "unique major" that is not offered by any Maryland college.

17. DIKONGUE never submitted a scholarship application with Senator A's Office, nor did she complete the required essay. Therefore, DIKONGUE was never considered by the Scholarship Committee as a prospective scholarship candidate, and was never chosen for a scholarship award by Senator A.

18. However, in July 2022, DIKONGUE awarded herself a Senatorial Scholarship by advising MHEC via email that she was one of the students who was selected to receive scholarship funds through Senator A's selection process. DIKONGUE advised MHEC employee L.R. via

email that she needed to be “grant[ed] access” to her own student portal, among others, to award funds.

19. L.R. responded to DIKONGUE’s email and asked what the award amounts for DIKONGUE and another student were, and on July 15, 2022, DIKONGUE advised that the award for the other student was \$1,200 and that the award for herself was \$10,000.

20. L.R. emailed DIKONGUE again to confirm whether she meant \$10,000 and not \$1,000 should be awarded to DIKONGUE’s account, and DIKONGUE confirmed, “Yes, it is \$10,000.”

21. On July 18, 2022, L.R. emailed DIKONGUE and advised that “[t]he students have been awarded.”

22. DIKONGUE directed the Maryland funds fraudulently awarded to her portal be sent to a school in Washington, D.C. where she was enrolled in a Master’s Program.

23. DIKONGUE’s last day of employment with Senator A was March 17, 2023.

C. After Esther DIKONGUE’s Employment

24. On May 26, 2024, after DIKONGUE’s employment with Senator A had ended, DIKONGUE secretly and without permission, logged onto Senator A’s email account using Senator A’s password, which had not been changed since the last day of DIKONGUE’s employment.

25. On May 26, 2024, DIKONGUE sent an email from Senator A’s senatorial email to MHEC and advised MHEC, “[O]ur office authorizes her [DIKONGUE’s] scholarship for the spring of 2025 to be moved to [a student’s] [s]ummer I semester of 2024, as she will graduate in the fall of 2024.” The email then provided DIKONGUE’s name and unique MHEC ID number. DIKONGUE signed off this emailing using the signature lines of Legislative Aide, J.O., and

Legislative Aide, S.C., without their knowledge or permission.

26. On May 28, 2024, while no longer employed by Senator A, DIKONGUE accessed Senator A's email account again, and sent a second email to MHEC. In this email, DIKONGUE clarified for MHEC that the scholarship referenced in the May 26, 2024 email was a "renewal" and that "the student [DIKONGUE] needs [the funds] this summer." DIKONGUE again used the signature lines of Legislative Aide, J.O., and Legislative Aide, S.C., without their knowledge or permission.

27. On June 22, 2024, while no longer employed by Senator A, DIKONGUE accessed Senator A's email account again, and sent a third email to MHEC. In this email, DIKONGUE advised MHEC that "[i]f you cannot apply the spring funds to the summer, apply the full award to the fall semester." In this email, DIKONGUE used the signature lines of Legislative Aide, J.O., and Legislative Aide, S.C., for a third time, without their knowledge or permission.

28. Based on the false information DIKONGUE provided to MHEC, MHEC accordingly reallocated the award amount for the full academic year to DIKONGUE's account for the Fall 2024 semester.

29. DIKONGUE received the following disbursements of senatorial scholarship funding, totaling \$20,000:

Date	Amount	Year	Term
09/19/22	\$5,000	2022-2023	Fall Term 1
02/07/23	\$5,000	2022-2023	Spring Term 2
03/06/24	\$10,000	2023-2024	Spring Term 2

II. THEFT AND UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS

30. The Grand Jury Incorporates paragraphs 1 – 29 of this Criminal Information as

though fully set forth herein.

COUNT 1 – THEFT SCHEME: \$1,500 TO UNDER \$25,000

31. On or about July 14, 2022 through June 25, 2024, at Anne Arundel County, Maryland, ESTHER DIKONGUE-BAYIGHOMOG did, between the dates of July 14, 2022 and June 25, 2024, pursuant to one scheme and continuing course of conduct, steal senatorial scholarship money of the Maryland Legislature having a value of at least \$1,500 but less than \$25,000, to wit: DIKONGUE caused an MHEC employee to access DIKONGUE's own Maryland Higher Education Commission account to award \$20,000 in funds without authorization, in violation of §7-104 of the Criminal Law Article and against the peace, government and dignity of the State.

CJIS Code 1_1160
Criminal Law §7-104
Penalty 5 years and/or \$10,000

COUNT 2 – THEFT

32. On or about July 14, 2022, at Anne Arundel County, Maryland, ESTHER DIKONGUE-BAYIGHOMOG did steal senatorial scholarship money having a value of at least \$1,500 but less than \$25,000, to wit: DIKONGUE advised a Maryland Higher Education Commission employee to transfer \$10,000 in senatorial scholarship money into DIKONGUE'S own Maryland Higher Education Commission account, intentionally deceiving them by creating a false impression that she was permitted to receive these scholarship funds, in violation of §7-104(b) of the Criminal Law Article and against the peace, government and dignity of the State.

CJIS Code 1_1136
Criminal Law §7-104(b)
Penalty 5 years and/or \$10,000

COUNT 3 – UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS TO COMPUTERS AND RELATED MATERIAL

33. On or about May 26, 2024, at Anne Arundel County, Maryland, ESTHER DIKONGUE-BAYIGHOMOG did intentionally, willfully, and without authorization access a computer system, to wit: after DIKONGUE was no longer employed by Senator A's office, DIKONGUE accessed Senator A's email account to fraudulently direct the Maryland Higher Education Commission to move DIKONGUE's Spring 2025 semester scholarship money to the Summer 2024 semester, in violation of §7-302 of the Criminal Law Article and against the peace, government and dignity of the State.

*CJIS Code 1_2804
Criminal Law §7-302
Penalty 3 years and/or \$1,000*

COUNT 4 – UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS TO COMPUTERS AND RELATED MATERIAL

34. On or about May 28, 2024, at Anne Arundel County, Maryland, ESTHER DIKONGUE- BAYIGHOMOG did intentionally, willfully, and without authorization access a computer system, to wit: after DIKONGUE was no longer employed by Senator A's office, DIKONGUE accessed Senator A's email account to fraudulently direct the Maryland Higher Education Commission to renew DIKONGUE's academic award, and requesting the funds be transferred to the Summer 2024 semester, in violation of §7-302 of the Criminal Law Article and against the peace, government and dignity of the State.

*CJIS Code 1_2804
Criminal Law §7-302
Penalty 3 years and/or \$1,000*

COUNT 5 – UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS TO COMPUTERS AND RELATED MATERIAL


35. On or about June 22, 2024, at Anne Arundel County, Maryland, ESTHER DIKONGUE-BAYIGHOMOG did intentionally, willfully, and without authorization access a computer system, to wit: after DIKONGUE was no longer employed by Senator A's office, DIKONGUE accessed Senator A's email account to fraudulently direct the Maryland Higher Education Commission to move DIKONGUE's Spring 2025 semester scholarship money to the Fall 2024 semester, in the event they were unable to award it for the Summer 2024 semester, in violation of §7-302 of the Criminal Law Article and against the peace, government and dignity of the State.

*CJIS Code 1_2804
Criminal Law §7-302
Penalty 3 years and/or \$1,000*

Respectfully Submitted,

Charlton T. Howard, III
Maryland State Prosecutor

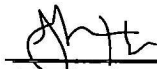
By:



Sarah.R.David Jan 21, 2025 15:04 EST

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