



PRESS RELEASE

Former Executive of Chicago-Area Non-Profit Sentenced to Prison for \$1.9 Million Fraud Schemes

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District
of Illinois

CHICAGO — A former executive of a Chicago-area non-profit organization has been sentenced to a year in federal prison for misappropriating nearly \$1.9 million through a pair of fraud schemes.

BARBARA HARRIS served as the Executive Director of the Center for Community Academic Success Partnerships (CCASP), which received government grants to provide after-school programs to schools in the Chicago area. From 2012 to 2017, Harris schemed with another CCASP executive, TONY BELL, to submit grant applications that inflated CCASP's projected annual expenses and falsely claimed that the organization would receive services from five subcontractors. In reality, Harris knew that the subcontractors, two of which were other non-profit groups run by Harris and Bell, provided no actual services to CCASP. The scheme resulted in approximately \$1.8 million in losses to the Illinois Department of Education.

Harris also engaged in a separate fraud scheme before and after she was indicted in the CCASP fraud case. From 2021 to 2023, while serving as Co-Executive Director of another non-profit, specifically, the South Suburban Community Services (SSCS), Harris bilked the federally funded AmeriCorps VISTA program, which awards grants to non-profits working to bring communities out of poverty. Harris submitted grant applications falsely representing that

VISTA members would work for SSCS programs in the south suburbs of Chicago. Harris knew, however, that those SSCS programs had already been funded. Harris nonetheless obtained approval for eleven VISTA members to work at SSCS, and none of them performed services in accordance with their assignment descriptions, causing a loss to the VISTA program of \$98,699.

Harris, 55, of South Holland, Ill., pleaded guilty last year to a federal wire fraud charge and admitted her criminal conduct in both schemes. On March 20, 2026, U.S. District Judge Andrea R. Wood sentenced Harris to 12 months in federal prison.

Harris's sentence was announced by Andrew S. Boutros, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, John Woolley, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General's Midwestern Regional Office, and Adam Jobes, Special Agent-in-Charge of IRS Criminal Investigation in Chicago. Valuable assistance was provided by the Chicago Field Office of the FBI, the AmeriCorps Office of Inspector General, and the Illinois Office of Executive Inspector General.

"This type of crime erodes the public's faith in non-profit organizations generally and the federal programs that fund these organizations," Assistant U.S. Attorney Caitlin Walgamuth argued in the government's sentencing memorandum in Harris's case. "Additionally, because the misappropriated grant funds were competitive, Harris's conduct likely denied other organizations critical federal funding opportunities."

Bell, 65, of Matteson, Ill., pleaded guilty last year to a federal wire fraud charge. Judge Wood scheduled Bell's sentencing for Aug. 21, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.

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Topic

FINANCIAL FRAUD

Component

[USAO - Illinois, Northern](#)



Northern District of Illinois

Eastern Division

219 S. Dearborn St., 5th Floor

Chicago, IL 60604

Western Division

327 S. Church Street, Room 3300

Rockford, IL 61101

Email USAO-NDIL



Chicago: (312) 353-5300

Rockford: (815) 987-4444