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Rabbi and 3 Others Stole 12m from School for Disabled Kids

By Christina Carrega-Woodby

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From left, Roy Hoffman, Rabbi Samuel Hiller, Ira Kurman, and Daniel Laniado all hid from the cameras while leaving their arraignment Tuesday.

Four men, including a rabbi, were indicted on Tuesday on charges they stole millions of dollars from a taxpayer-funded preschool for disabled kids.

Rabbi Samuel Hiller, Ira Kurman, Roy Hoffman and Daniel Laniado from the Island Child Development Center (ICDC) were busted for allegedly siphoning off \$12.4 million of the institution's \$27 million state-funded budget between 2005 and 2012, using the money for themselves and for other business interests.

"The public funds provided to [ICDC] were earmarked for special needs pre-schoolers with disabilities but instead were allegedly used by the defendants for their own purposes," said Queens DA Richard A. Brown.

An investigation into ICDC ensued in July 2012 when the state comptroller's office notified Kurman, the former Executive Director, that it planned to conduct a routine audit of the Special Education Itinerant Teachers' (SEIT) funds. When the auditors arrived at the meeting, Kurman quit and allegedly fled with the records.

"These individuals allegedly stole millions of taxpayer dollars meant for special needs children in a brazen disregard for common decency and the law," said state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli.

ICDC is one of the city's largest providers of special education services for disabled children — primarily in the Orthodox Jewish communities of Far Rockaway in Queens and Williamsburg and Borough Park, in Brooklyn — between the ages of 3 to 5.

The quartet are expected to be arraigned this afternoon on a 42-count indictment which they are variously charged with grand larceny, offering a false instrument for filing, identity theft and falsifying business records, according to Brown.

Rabbi Hiller, 56, is accused of using \$8 million to fund numerous other religious schools and camps which are not affiliated with ICDC. Money was diverted to fund an Orthodox youth summer camps called Camp Malka in Green County, NY and Camp Ohra Day in Far Rockaway, \$3 million allegedly went to B'nos Bais Yaakov Academy, a private all girls school where Hiller is the principal and \$30,000 for a plumbing job at his Elvira Avenue home.

Kurman, 52, allegedly gave loans totaling more than \$143,000 to members of the community. Some of the repayments were catering services for his daughter's wedding and his son's Bar Mitzvah.

Hoffmann, 50, allegedly used \$300,000 to remodel his Woodmere home and gave his wife \$15,000.

Laniado, 41, the owner of a Kosher supermarket in Borough Park, allegedly cashed more than \$1 million in ICDC checks at cash checking locations. The checks were in the names of businesses or individuals who didn't consent to Laniado cashing them.

A civil forfeiture action was filed seeking more than \$11,472,000 against all four men, almost \$1 million has been repaid by Rabbi Hiller's school and Camp Malka.