Former Loretto Hospital Exec Charged With Embezzling $500K During COVID Crisis

May 13, 2024

This story was republished from Block Club Chicago.

A former Loretto Hospital executive is accused of helping to embezzle nearly $500,000 from the West Side safety-net hospital.

Heather Bergdahl, 37, has been charged with embezzlement, according to a criminal complaint released Monday. The charges come amid an FBI investigation into Loretto after Block Club Chicago and the Better Government Association revealed questionable practices at the hospital — including funneling vaccine doses meant for the city’s poorest people to places where Chicago’s wealthiest lived and played.

Bergdahl was arrested Thursday night when federal authorities learned she was sitting on a plane ready to take off for Dubai. Agents rushed to stop the flight and...
remove her, said a federal official who took part in the arrest.

The criminal complaint refers to an Individual A with whom Bergdahl worked to embezzle and steal about $487,000 from the hospital. Individual A is not named, but details in the complaint make clear the pseudonym refers to Anosh Ahmed — another former Loretto executive who faced scrutiny and resigned after Block Club’s reports.

Ahmed did not appear to be facing charges as of Monday afternoon. Prosecutors have filed a series of cases under seal that appear to be related to the investigation.

The investigation is ongoing, said Joseph Fitzpatrick, spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Chicago.

Loretto Hospital is a safety-net facility that receives significant public funding and serves low-income people.

“Unfortunately, the hospital was targeted and preyed upon, and it fell victim to a crime,” according to a Loretto statement released Monday. “For legal reasons, we are currently unable to discuss details, but we continue to offer our full cooperation and support the investigation.”

Ahmed created business entities, and Bergdahl issued at least 11 checks from the hospital to them, according to the complaint. But the entities did not “provide any goods or services to [Loretto] that would justify such that payments,” according to the complaint.

“Bergdahl issued these funds to [Ahmed], and [Ahmed] took these funds, both knowing that the funds had been embezzled from the hospital,” according to the criminal complaint.

Ahmed hired Bergdahl, and it appeared they knew each other before that from living in Houston, according to the criminal complaint.

After Ahmed resigned in March 2021, Bergdahl continued at the hospital — and issued $486,540 in checks from the hospital to companies where Ahmed was the CEO, according to the complaint.

Ahmed would deposit the money into the bank accounts for those companies, then
move them to other accounts he controlled, according to the complaint. None of the companies provides services or goods to Loretto Hospital, according to the criminal complaint.

The accounts listed an address in the 400 block of North Wabash Avenue, according to the complaint. Ahmed had a home at Trump Tower on the block. Around November 2021, the accounts’ addresses were changed to an address in Houston — where Ahmed had a condo.

Eric Trump, left, stands with Dr. Anosh Ahmed, then chief operating officer of Loretto Hospital on Chicago’s West Side. (Credit: Provided/Block Club Chicago)

Four of the checks — which totaled $314,888.96 — were issued just in the four days after Ahmed opened the bank accounts, according to the complaint.

Bergdahl didn’t submit bills, invoices or other proof of a transaction for the checks, going against Loretto’s usual practices, according to the complaint.

And while Bergdahl was employed at Loretto Hospital, she received more than $419,000 from two of Ahmed’s accounts, according to the complaint.

Records also showed phones connected to Bergdahl and Ahmed making frequent contact, including during the times when the checks were issued from the hospital to the entities controlled by Ahmed, according to the complaint.

“I believe that, during those calls, Bergdahl and [Ahmed] planned and
coordinated Bergdahl’s embezzlement of [Loretto’s] funds by way of checks made payable to the Individual A Entities, and [Ahmed’s] opening of bank accounts in the names of those entities to receive those funds,” an FBI agent notes in the complaint.

Some of the checks also included a signature from Ahmed on the payor line, even though he was no longer working at Loretto Hospital, according to the complaint.

There are other indications the businesses that received funds were not legitimate, such as them lacking websites, not having business registrations and not having regular banking transactions, according to the complaint.

Bergdahl left Loretto Hospital in March 2022 but continued as a contractor until that April, when the hospital “terminated its relationship” with her, according to the complaint.

Bergdahl currently works as the CFO at Anosh Inc. in Houston, Texas, according to her LinkedIn profile. She lives in Houston, where Ahmed also has a residence.

The U.S. Attorney’s Office filed a complaint, not an indictment, against Bergdahl — something typically done when prosecutors are going to arrest somebody quickly. Prosecutors now have 30 days to go to the grand jury to get an indictment, although they can get extensions.

Bergdahl was released on a $486,000 bond secured by her parent’s home, court records show. As a condition of her release, Bergdahl was ordered to have no contact with Ahmed, according to federal court papers filed in Texas. Bergdahl’s attorney, Jordan Melissa Matthews, did not immediately return a call for comment Monday afternoon.

Bergdahl’s attorney, Jordan Melissa Matthews, did not immediately return a call for comment Monday afternoon.

Loretto Hospital has seen several shakeups and FBI investigations since Block Club’s reporting.

Starting in March 2021, Block Club revealed the hospital was funneling vaccines meant for underserved areas of the West Side to ineligible people at Chicago’s Trump Tower, where Loretto’s then-chief financial officer, Ahmed, lived, and at a luxury jewelry store and high-end Gold Coast steakhouse where Ahmed hung
out. Miller’s suburban church also received vaccines.

Block Club then partnered with the Better Government Association to show Ahmed’s friends won contracts worth $4 million from the nonprofit hospital while Loretto board members took hospital-funded Caribbean trips, among other benefits.

The Loretto Hospital investigations led to FBI and state probes, the resignation of Ahmed, the end of Miller’s leadership at the hospital and prompted the city to take over vaccine distribution to ensure doses went to West Siders who were struggling to get shots instead of the rich and powerful.

Kelly Bauer is a senior editor at Block Club Chicago. David Jackson is an investigative reporter at Injustice Watch.