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**For Immediate Release – August 6, 2004**

**Contact:** Pam Russell  
Public Information  
303-271-6905

**RE:** Sophia Gardner Plead Guilty to Theft from LEAP Program

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Sophia Soliz Gardner, DOB: 9-29-44, of Denver, appeared today in Jefferson County District Court and pled guilty to conspiracy to commit theft (a class 5 felony) and embezzlement of public property (a class 5 felony).

Gardner is one of seven people charged in November, 2003 with fraudulently accessing money available through the Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP). The Program is administered through the Jefferson County Division of Human Services (DHS).

Of the seven women charged, four were employed as seasonal workers with the program, one was an employee of Jeffco DHS in Support Services, and the other two were friends of two of the season workers. Gardner is the second one to have pled guilty at this time and the others are in various stages of the criminal justice process. Three have trial dates set for this fall.

Gardner was an eligibility technician with the Program. She is accused of having fraudulently applied for LEAP benefits for her deceased husband and her son and then spending the funds for personal use (\$1,062).

She is scheduled to be sentenced on September 24, 2004 at 8:00 a.m. in Division 11 of the Jefferson County District Court. She could potentially face up to a maximum of six years in prison.

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