



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**WASHINGTON BUSINESS OWNER SENTENCED TO 18 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR
PARTICIPATING IN CONSPIRACY TO DEFRAUD THE UNITED STATES
AND MAKING FALSE CLAIMS ON GOVERNMENT CONTRACT**

WASHINGTON – A founder and president of a Washington-area design firm was sentenced today to 18 months in prison for her role in a conspiracy to defraud the United States in the award of a government contract for U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Department of Justice announced today.

Darlene Mathis-Gardner was also sentenced by Judge Richard J. Leon to 36 months of supervised release after her incarceration and to pay \$389,738 in restitution to ICE. Mathis-Gardner was charged with the conspiracy in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on April 8, 2011, and she pleaded guilty on April 18, 2011.

According to the two-count felony charge, Mathis-Gardner conspired with others to defraud the United States in order to obtain the award of a contract by the General Services Administration (GSA) for interior design work to be performed on Potomac Center North, a building in the southwest of Washington that ICE was renovating as a new headquarters. Mathis-Gardner provided false information and documents to GSA officials in order to obtain the contract. According to the court documents, Mathis-Gardner and her co-conspirators misrepresented their company's background and qualifications and created fictitious documentation of the company's past performance in order to convince government officials that they were qualified to perform the work. Based on the misrepresentations and false documents, the government awarded Mathis-Gardner's company a contract worth approximately \$1.3 million. The department said that the conspiracy to fraudulently obtain the contract took place from in or about March 2007 until at least in or about June 2007.

The charges further state that once the contract was obtained, Mathis-Gardner knowingly presented invoices to GSA that falsely overstated the number of hours that her firm had worked. The department said that the falsely inflated invoices were submitted during the period between June 2007 and January 2009. According to the court documents, as a result of the charged offenses, ICE suffered a loss of \$389,738.

Mathis-Gardner's plea arose from an investigation into procurement fraud occurring against ICE conducted by the Antitrust Division's National Criminal Enforcement Section (NCES) and the ICE Office of Professional Responsibility.

Anyone with information concerning collusion or fraud by businesses seeking ICE contracts is urged to call NCES at 202-307-5777, visit www.justice.gov/atr/contact/newcase.htm or contact the DHS tipline at 1-877-2INTAKE or Joint.Intake@dhs.gov.

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