



# Department of Justice

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## **TWO FORMER NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUS INSPECTORS PLEAD GUILTY TO BRIBERY CHARGES**

LEV L. DASSIN, the Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that two former employees of the New York City Department of Education ("DOE"), NEIL CREMIN and IRA SOKOL, pleaded guilty today before United States Magistrate Judge ANDREW J. PECK in Manhattan federal court to bribery charges. According to the Indictment, to Count Four of which CREMIN and SOKOL pleaded guilty, and other documents filed in the proceeding:

CREMIN, 61, of Queens, New York and SOKOL, 70, of Brooklyn, New York, worked as supervisors and inspectors in the DOE Office of Pupil Transportation ("OPT"). OPT sets the specifications for bus routes; oversees the process by which private bus companies bid for and obtain certain bus routes; processes requests from bus companies to have certain routes classified as "extended" (and hence more costly) because they begin earlier or run later than standard DOE bus times; and conducts safety and mechanical inspections of school buses.

CREMIN and SOKOL were specifically assigned to the OPT division responsible for providing bus and other transportation services to special education students.

From at least the mid-1990s until 2007, CREMIN and SOKOL solicited and accepted cash payments from various private bus company owners who held transportation contracts with DOE. In some instances, the defendants used their official positions within DOE to collect payments from bus company owners in exchange for various benefits relating to OPT business. For example, the defendants took cash payments from bus company owners to falsely classify certain bus routes as "extended" routes, and in connection with the allocation of certain DOE bus routes to those companies. The defendants also collected payments in exchange for favorable treatment relating to school bus safety violations uncovered during inspections, and providing advance notice of safety inspections that were supposed to be unannounced. In some instances, the defendants knew that the bus company owners were making payments in the belief that they would receive improper benefits in exchange, but the defendants could not in fact deliver those benefits. In other instances, the payments were not connected to any particular benefit, but were intended to secure the goodwill of the defendants. The defendants and other OPT employees collected cash payments from several hundred dollars per year from certain bus company owners, to tens of thousands of dollars per year from other bus company owners.

CREMIN and SOKOL pleaded guilty to one count of receiving bribes to influence their action as employees of an agency, the DOE, that received federal program funding. They face maximum sentences of 10 years on that charge.

The Indictment also charges a former OPT employee, GEORGE ORTIZ, 63, of the Bronx, New York, and a present OPT employee, MILTON SMITH, 55, of Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania, with offenses relating to solicitation and extortion of bribes and payments relating to their functions at DOE. ORTIZ and SMITH are scheduled to commence trial on February 23, 2009, in front of the United States District Judge BARBARA S. JONES. The charges contained in the Indictment as to these defendants are merely accusations, and they are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Mr. DASSIN praised the work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General and Office of Labor-Management Standards, and the New York Police Department, as well as the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District.

Assistant United States Attorneys ELIE HONIG and KENNETH POLITE are in charge of the prosecution.