



# Department of Justice

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Middle District of Florida

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## **DUVAL COUNTY FAMILY INDICTED AND ARRESTED ON IMMIGRATION CHARGES**

Jacksonville, FL - U.S. Attorney Robert E. O'Neill announces the return of a multi-count indictment against Mowafak Shahla (42), Fadi Chahla (39), Antoun Chahla (41), Fadel Chahla (69), and Nuhad Numan (60), all of Jacksonville, charging them with conspiracy to commit marriage fraud and to make false statements to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The indictment also charges Mowafak Shahla, Fadi Chahla, and Antoun Chahla with unlawfully procuring naturalization and citizenship.

Fadel Chahla and Nuhad Numan are the parents of Mowafak Shahla, Fadi Chahla, and Antoun Chahla. All five of the defendants emigrated at different times, from Syria, to the United States.

The indictment alleges a multi-object conspiracy involving Raymond Knight working with Mowafak Shahla to broker a series of fraudulent marriages. The conspiracy involved three United States citizens entering into fraudulent marriages in exchange for money. The three fraudulent marriages involved Mowafak Shahla and Victoria Knight, Fadi Chahla and Brenda Pettit, and Antoun Chahla and Genetta Knight. In support of these fraudulent marriages and in an attempt to procure naturalization and citizenship, each defendant

submitted documents containing false statements to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. Mowafak Shahla, Fadi Chahla, and Antoun Chahla were arrested at two different residences this morning in Jacksonville. Fadel Chahla and Nuhad Numan remain at large and may be outside of the United States. If convicted on all counts, Mowafak Shahla, Fadi Chahla, and Antoun Chahla each face a maximum penalty of up to 25 years imprisonment and \$750,000 in fines. In addition to these penalties, the United States is seeking forfeiture of two residences used to facilitate the crimes charged in the indictment.

On January 10, 2011, Victoria Knight pled guilty to conspiracy to make false statements to a government agency. On February 8, 2011, Genetta Knight pled guilty to conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, make false statements to a government agency, and mail fraud. On February 9, 2011, Brenda Pettit pled guilty to conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, make false statements to a government agency, and mail fraud. Each defendant is awaiting sentencing.

The case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Federal Air Marshal Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with assistance from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. Assistant United States Attorney Kevin C. Frein is handling the prosecution of this case.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.