

NEWS

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Former Paterson Housing Inspector Admits Extortion

(More)

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NEWARK – A former housing inspector for the City of Paterson pleaded guilty today to extortion under color of official right for accepting bribes in exchange for exercising official action, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Victor Ortiz, 43, formerly of Paterson and now of Pocono Pines, Pa., was a Paterson housing inspector at the time he took more than \$5,000 in cash from a local property manager who was in fact cooperating with the FBI and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Inspector General. Ortiz agreed to obtain dismissals of tenant complaints filed against the property manager in municipal court, among other official favors. He was initially arrested and charged in March 2007 and he was indicted in June 2007.

Ortiz admitted today before U.S. District Judge Jose L. Linares that he met the cooperating property manager on multiple occasions between January and March 2006 both on his own and with another housing inspector, Standley Williams, whom Ortiz introduced to the cooperating witness. Williams pleaded guilty to related bribery charges on August 2, 2007.

Together they solicited and took \$7,500 in cash which they split in exchange for performing prompt housing inspections, interceding when tenants filed complaints on the cooperating manger's properties, and providing any sort of necessary official assistance as specific opportunities arose. On another occasion, Ortiz solicited and accepted an additional \$1,000 for arranging for the dismissal of violations pending in Paterson Municipal Court.

The charge to which Ortiz pleaded guilty, conspiring to extort money under color of official right, carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Judge Linares scheduled sentencing for May 2, 2008, for Ortiz. He remains free on \$25,000 bond in the meantime.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI's Garret Mountain Resident Agency in West Paterson, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun; and Special Agents of HUD OIG, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Rene Febles, with the investigation that resulted in today's indictments.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Hope Olds of the Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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Defense Counsel: Miles R. Feinstein, Esq., Clifton

