

NEWS

United States Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey
402 East State Street, Room 430
Trenton, New Jersey 08608



Christopher J. Christie, U.S. Attorney

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Contact:

J. Gregory Reinert, Public Information Officer
856-757-5233

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Former Passaic Mayor Sentenced to 21 Months In Prison for Extortion

(More)

Greg Reinert, PAO
Public Affairs Office
<http://www.njusao.org>

856-757-5233
973-645-2888

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TRENTON – Former Passaic Mayor Samuel “Sammy” Rivera was sentenced to 21 months in federal prison today for engaging in an extortion scheme in which he accepted a bribe in return for his official assistance in attempting to steer public contracts to an FBI undercover company, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

U.S. District Judge Freda L. Wolfson also ordered Rivera, 61, to pay a \$4,000 fine and to serve two years of supervised release upon the completion of his prison term. Judge Wolfson continued Rivera’s release on a \$200,000 bond pending his surrender to officials with the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, to begin serving his prison term.

On May 9, 2008, Rivera pleaded guilty before Judge Wolfson to one count of attempted extortion under color of official right.

Rivera was arrested on Sept. 6, 2007, along with 10 other public officials and one private citizen. The arrests were part of a public corruption investigation that progressed from southern to northern New Jersey. Of the eleven public officials arrested, nine have either pled guilty or been convicted at trial. Two are pending trial in October, 2008.

“We are gratified that Judge Wolfson imposed a sentence within the range recommended by the federal Sentencing Guidelines for this very serious breach of the public trust,” said Christie. “This Office will continue to seek sentences within the applicable sentencing guideline range in our public corruption cases.”

At his plea hearing, Rivera admitted that, on August 13, 2007, he accepted a \$5,000 corrupt cash payment in exchange for using his official influence and assistance in attempting to obtain a City of Passaic insurance brokerage contract for an FBI undercover company, and for arranging meetings with other public officials to further obtain insurance business for the undercover company. Rivera also admitted that on August 29, 2007, he arranged and attended a meeting between key Passaic officials and members of the undercover company, where he advocated in favor of the undercover company’s business ventures.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Wolfson consulted the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant’s criminal history, if any, and other factors, including acceptance of responsibility. The judge has wide discretion and is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all of that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, for the investigation involving Rivera. He also credited prosecutors and investigators with the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Theodore F.L. Housel, for their assistance in the investigation.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Christopher J. Gramiccioni and David A. Bocian of the Office's Special Prosecutions Division.

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Defense counsel: Henry E. Klingeman, Esq. Newark