

NEWS

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J. Gregory Reinert, Public Information Officer FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Former Assemblyman Alfred Steele Sentenced to 15 Months in
Federal Prison for Attempted Extortion

(More)

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TRENTON – Former state Assemblyman Alfred E. Steele was sentenced to 15 months in federal prison today for accepting a total of \$15,500 in bribes from an undercover insurance brokerage company in return for his official assistance in steering public contracts to the company, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

U.S. District Judge Anne E. Thompson also ordered Steele, 54, to pay a \$10,000 fine and to serve two years of supervised release upon the completion of his prison term. As part of Steele's plea agreement, he agreed to forfeit \$15,500 representing the total amount of bribes he had taken.

In sentencing the defendant, Judge Thompson granted the government's motion for a downward departure under the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which the government argued was based on the defendant's cooperation during the investigation. Steele remains free on \$200,000 bond pending his surrender to officials with the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, on a date to be determined by prison authorities.

Steele was arrested on Sept. 6, 2007, along with 10 other public officials and one private citizen. Following his arrest, Steele resigned both his seat in the Assembly and his job as a Passaic County undersheriff.

At his plea hearing on Oct. 19, 2007, before Judge Thompson, Steele pleaded guilty to a one-count criminal Information charging attempted extortion under color of official right. Steele admitted that between March 2007 and August 2007, he accepted cash payments totaling \$15,500 in exchange for agreeing to use his official influence to assist in steering government insurance brokerage contracts to the FBI undercover company. He also admitted that, in return for his assistance in securing contracts for the company, he would receive a portion of the insurance brokerage's revenue.

Steele admitted that he arranged and attended meetings between representatives of the FBI undercover company and public officials within his legislative district and in other municipalities. Among them, he said, were meetings with officials from the Paterson School District, the Paterson Housing Authority and City of Passaic and City of Orange.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Thompson 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, however, 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 that time.

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

The cases against Steele and the other defendants are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys David Bocian and Christopher J. Gramiccioni.

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Defense Counsel for Steele: Greyson Hannigan, Esq.