

NEWS

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manzo1202.rel

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Jersey City Council Candidate Admits
Extorting Cash in Return for Official Influence

(More)

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NEWARK – Michael J. Manzo, an unsuccessful candidate for Jersey City Council, pleaded guilty today to conspiring to commit extortion, admitting he accepted a \$5,000 corrupt cash payment from a cooperating witness in return for exercising his future official authority in favor of the cooperating witness, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Manzo, 53, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Jose L. Linares to a one-count criminal Information charging him with conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right. Judge Linares continued Manzo's release on a \$25,000 bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for March 15.

At his plea hearing, Manzo, a longtime Jersey City arson investigator, admitted that in May 2009, while seeking to win a seat on the Jersey City council, he accepted a corrupt cash payment of \$5,000 from a cooperating witness (CW), which was paid through Joseph Castagna and Denis Jaslow, who also were charged with conspiring to commit extortion. Jaslow has pleaded guilty. Charges against Castagna are pending.

Manzo admitted that the payments were in exchange for the exercise of his future official assistance as an anticipated member of the city council. Manzo agreed that he would use his future city council position to assist the CW in obtaining certain development approvals for a purported development project on Garfield Avenue in Jersey City in return for the bribe payment.

Manzo's guilty plea stems from a two-track undercover FBI investigation into political corruption and international money laundering which resulted in the charging of 44 individuals via criminal Complaints on July 23.

The charge to which Manzo pleaded guilty carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. As part of Manzo's guilty plea, he agreed to forfeit the \$5,000 corrupt cash payment.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Linares will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which recommend sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offenses, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors, including acceptance of responsibility. The judge, however, has discretion and is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

The prosecution and defense have agreed that, under the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, Manzo faces a sentence of between 10 and 16 months in prison.

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

Fishman credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, and IRS Criminal Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge William P. Offord, for the investigation leading to today's guilty plea.

The case against Manzo is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sandra L. Moser of the U.S. Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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Defense Counsel: Frank P. Arleo, Esq. and Stacey Biancamano, Esq., West Orange