

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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East Orange Contractor Admits Extorting Cash in
Return for Official Influence

(More)

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NEWARK – An East Orange general contractor pleaded guilty today to conspiring to commit extortion, admitting he accepted thousands of dollars in corrupt cash payments from a cooperating witness in return for having an East Orange construction code official exercise his future official assistance in favor of the cooperating witness’s project, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Rogelio D. Thompson, 52, of East Orange, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Susan D. Wigenton to a one-count Information that charges him with conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right. Judge Wigenton released Thompson on a \$25,000 bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for March.

At his plea hearing, Thompson admitted that between February 2007 and November 2007, he accepted \$7,000 in corrupt cash payments from a cooperating witness who was an East Orange store owner (the “CW”). Thompson admitted that the payments were in exchange for having Billie F. Thomas, 54, a.k.a “Billie Mohamed,” an East Orange construction code official, exercise his future official assistance in return for corrupt payments. Allegedly, Thomas agreed that in return for the bribe payments he would use his position as a construction code official to assist the CW in obtaining certificates of occupancy for a purported store inspection.

Thompson’s guilty plea stems from an undercover FBI investigation into political corruption in East Orange. As part of the investigation both Thomas and Thompson were recorded, on video, extorting \$4,000 from the store owner on November 9, 2007.”

Thomas was charged in a criminal Complaint in October 2009 with one count of conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right and one count of extortion under color of official right. The case is pending trial.

The charge to which Thompson pleaded guilty carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Wigenton 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.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. A defendant who is 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, for the investigation leading to today’s guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard E. Constable, III of the U.S. Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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Defense Counsel: David Glazer, Esq. Livingston