



*United States Attorney
District of New Jersey*

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**FORMER CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT FOR JERSEY CITY PLEADS GUILTY
TO CORRUPT PAYMENTS CONSPIRACY**

NEWARK, N.J. – Former City Council President of Jersey City, N.J., Mariano Vega Jr. pleaded guilty today for agreeing to accept \$30,000 in corrupt payments and illicit campaign contributions in exchange for exercising his future official influence and authority, United States Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Vega, 60, of Jersey City, pleaded guilty before United States District Judge Jose L. Linares to conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right – Count One of the Indictment. Judge Linares continued Vega’s release on a \$75,000 bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for January 7, 2011.

According to the Indictment to which he pleaded, other documents filed in this case, and statements made in Newark federal court:

While Vega was City Council President and running for re-election, he agreed to accept an illicit cash campaign contribution of \$10,000 from a cooperating witness (“CW”) who purported to be a real estate developer. He also agreed to accept an additional \$20,000 after winning the election.

Vega admitted that all of the \$30,000 payments were in exchange for his future official assistance, action and influence in Jersey City government matters pertaining to the CW’s anticipated real estate development projects. Vega also admitted that all of the payments he accepted from the CW were paid through Maher Khalil, who was the assistant director of the Jersey City Department of Health and Human Services at the time.

U.S. Attorney Fishman stated: “Mariano Vega admitted that he took an illicit payment when running to keep his seat, then kept his hand out after he won. The people of New Jersey deserve better, and this Office remains committed to prosecuting corrupt public officials who betray their trust.”

“Mr. Vega’s conviction, as unfortunate as the circumstances are, serves the interests of justice and is a victory for the people of New Jersey,” said Michael B. Ward, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI’s Newark division. “The FBI and its law enforcement partners will continue to work tirelessly to root out public corruption wherever it may be.”

The charge to which Vega pleaded guilty carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. As part of Vega’s guilty plea, he agreed to forfeit \$20,000 – the

portion of the corrupt payments he had agreed to accept that he had received by the time of his arrest.

Khalil pleaded guilty before Judge Linares on September 9, 2009, to conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right and awaits sentencing.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Ward, and special agents of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Victor W. Lessoff, for the investigation leading to today's guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sandra L. Moser of the U.S. Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division.

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Defense counsel: Peter Willis, Esq., Jersey City, N.J.