

NEWS

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Three New Jersey Residents Convicted of Selling Pennsylvania Drivers Licences to Illegal Aliens

(More)

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CAMDEN – A jury convicted three New Jersey residents on Tuesday of conspiring to unlawfully obtain drivers licenses for illegal aliens, who paid between \$2,500 and \$4,000 for the bogus credentials, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

The jury in federal court convicted Altagracia Rosario, a/k/a “Grace,” 48; her daughter, Nancy Elgende, a/k/a “Nancy Miranda,” 29; and Jose Rios, 44, all of Robbinsville, on the conspiracy charge.

According to the charge and evidence at trial, Rosario charged illegal aliens between \$2,500 and \$4,000 and assisted them in unlawfully obtaining non-commercial and commercial drivers licenses issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (“PennDOT”).

Opening statements in the trial began on May 9, 2007; closing arguments were on May 23, 2007. The jury returned its verdict yesterday afternoon after approximately seven hours of deliberations over two days. U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Irenas scheduled sentencing for Sept. 6, 2007. All are on bail pending sentencing, though the government is moving in court tomorrow to have the defendants’ bail revoked on the grounds of flight risk and that they are a danger to the community.

“These individuals enabled in some cases non-English speaking, illegal aliens to get licenses and climb behind the wheel of tractor-trailers,” said Christie. “That’s not only criminal, it’s frightening. We’re glad they are out of business and headed to prison.”

The case was tried by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kathleen O’Leary and Anthony Moscato.

“These convictions are a reminder and warning to anyone who would seek to circumvent our immigration laws through the creation or distribution of fraudulent identification documents,” said Kyle Hutchins, Special Agent in Charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Newark. “This criminal activity could seriously undermine our national security, as identification documents are the key to obtaining benefits, and to facilitating criminal and terrorist activity that is difficult for law enforcement to uncover.”

According to evidence at trial, Rosario altered and created fraudulent and counterfeit immigration documents, such as passports and visas, which Rosario, Elgende, Rios and others used to obtain the drivers licenses for their illegal immigrant clients. At trial, the government introduced various scanned images of U.S.-issued visas in various stages of alteration that were found on a computer hard drive seized by federal agents from Rosario’s residence in Robbinsville during the execution of a search warrant. In addition, the government introduced as evidence numerous foreign passports, altered and counterfeit visas, birth certificates and social security cards in other individuals’ names, all of which were found in Rosario’s residence during the search.

The evidence at trial, in the form of an audio recorded conversation between an individual acting in an undercover capacity and Elgende, showed Elgende, posing as a Spanish translator, giving the answers to a commercial driver's license knowledge test.

The Superseding Indictment that charged the defendants in this case also charged the following individuals: Ronald Henry, 64, Philadelphia, a PennDot employee; Lizette Mahsel, 25, of Robbinsville; and Christopher Nix, 26, also of Robbinsville.

Before trial commenced on May 7, 2007, Mahsel and Nix both pleaded guilty to conspiring to produce five or more driver's licenses. During trial, Henry also pleaded guilty to conspiring to produce five or more drivers licenses. As part of his plea agreement, Henry acknowledged that he had abused his position of trust as a PennDOT employee to commit the offense.

Rosario, Elgende, Rios, Henry, Mahsel, and Nix were each charged in a Superseding Indictment on May 30, 2006.

Christie credited Special Agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Kyle Hutchins, the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor, under the direction of Executive Director Thomas DeMaria; and PennDot, under the direction of Steven G. Kozar.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kathleen P. O'Leary and Anthony Moscato, Jr., of the U.S. Attorney's Office Public Protection Unit in Newark.

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Defense Counsel:

Michael N. Huff, Esq., for defendant Altagracia Rosario

Elizabeth H. Smith, Esq., for defendant Nancy Elgende

John Renner, Esq., for defendant Jose Rios