

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 8, 2009

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

(More)

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NEWARK – LaVern Webb-Washington, an unsuccessful candidate for Jersey City Council (Ward F), pleaded guilty today to conspiring to commit extortion, admitting she accepted corrupt cash payments from a cooperating witness in return for exercising her future official authority in favor of the cooperating witness, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., announced.

Webb-Washington, 61, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Jose L. Linares to a one-count criminal Information charging her with conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right. Judge Linares continued Webb-Washington's release on a \$50,000 bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for Jan. 12.

At her plea hearing, Webb-Washington, a self-described housing activist serving as head of the Webb-Washington Community Development Corporation, admitted that between March 2009 and May 2009, while seeking to win a seat on the Jersey City council, she accepted three corrupt cash payments totaling \$15,000 from a cooperating witness (CW).

Webb-Washington admitted that the payments were in exchange for her exercising her future official assistance, as an anticipated member of the city council. Webb-Washington agreed that she would use her 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 payments. Webb-Washington further admitted that she had agreed to accept an additional corrupt cash payment from the CW after the election.

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

The charge to which Webb-Washington pleaded guilty carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. As part of Webb-Washington's guilty plea, she agreed to forfeit the \$15,000 in corrupt cash payments.

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 defendants' criminal histories, 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. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all of that time.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge

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

The case against Webb-Washington is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Maureen Nakly of the U.S. Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

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Defense Counsel: Lorraine Gaudi-Rufo, Esq., Federal Public Defender's Office, Newark