



Department of Justice

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50 INDICTED AS PART OF INVESTIGATION INTO MARRIAGE FRAUD SCHEME

CINCINNATI – Teams of ICE agents today began locating and arresting 50 people named in 27 federal indictments charging them with participating in a Cincinnati-based scheme to arrange sham marriages in order to evade U.S. immigration laws. Those indicted include 23 people who are in the U.S. illegally and 27 U.S. citizens they married.

Gregory G. Lockhart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, and Brian Moskowitz, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Investigations in Ohio and Michigan, announced the arrests today.

A federal grand jury returned the indictments on August 5. The indictments were unsealed today. All 50 are charged with marriage fraud. Forty-nine are also charged with making false written statements and 39 are charged with making false representations. Each of the crimes is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, a fine of up to \$250,000 and three years of supervised release. Those who are in the country illegally also face deportation.

The arrests are part of an ongoing marriage fraud investigation based in Cincinnati and known as Operation Honeymoon's Over. Ten were indicted as part of the investigation in March 2009 on charges of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud. Of those ten, eight have pleaded guilty to arranging multiple sham marriages in order to help resident aliens obtain permanent legal residence status. They are awaiting sentencing. Two of those indicted in March remain at large.

Five others have also been charged and convicted in the course of the investigation for a total of 13 convictions to date.

"The investigation has unraveled a scheme that began in 2007 to arrange marriages between Eastern European aliens and U.S. citizens," Lockhart said. "The Eastern Europeans paid a fee to the U.S. citizens and the leaders of the conspiracy to arrange the marriage. They created false documents indicating that the marriages were legal and presented the false documents to immigration officials."

"Marriage fraud poses a major vulnerability that must not go unchallenged," said Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for ICE John Morton. "The significant number of indictments today as well the previous convictions that have been handed down as a result of Operation Honeymoon's Over should send the unambiguous message that ICE will not tolerate the exploitation of our country's immigration system."

Last year, ICE made 238 criminal arrests related to marriage fraud schemes and was successful in handing out convictions for 198 of those individuals. ICE also seized nearly \$430,000 in

assets related to marriage fraud cases nationally. The public is invited to call the ICE Law Enforcement Support Center (LESC) tip-line at 1-866-DHS-2-ICE (1-866-243-2-423) with information about illegal immigration.

A list of those indicted and arrested is attached.

An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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