

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Jan. 24, 2008

Owner of Plainfield Driving School Gets 41 Months in Prison
for Conspiring with MVC Employees to Sell Drivers' Licenses

(More)

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NEWARK – An owner of a now-defunct driving school in Plainfield was sentenced today to 41 months in federal prison for conspiring for a decade with employees of the New Jersey Division of Motor Vehicles to produce drivers' licenses in exchange for cash payments, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

U.S. District Judge William H. Walls also fined Jose L. Flores, a/k/a "Mr. Pepe" \$10,000 and ordered him to surrender to the federal Bureau of Prisons by March 24 to begin serving his sentence. Under the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, Flores faced a range of between 37 and 46 months in prison.

Flores, 47, of Watchung, pleaded guilty before Judge Walls on Dec. 12, 2005, and admitted participating in a state-wide scheme with multiple DMV employees to unlawfully generate drivers' licenses, often for individuals in the country illegally. Flores, who was an owner of Mr. Pepe's Driving School in Plainfield, admitted making cash payments ranging from \$20 to \$100 to each DMV employee who assisted in generating a particular driver's license. Judge Walls has sentenced more than a dozen others convicted in the scheme to sentences ranging from house arrest to 33 months in prison.

(The former DMV is now known as the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission.)

"The conduct by Flores and his conspirators raised serious concerns about a variety of crimes or potential crimes, including public corruption, immigration and identity fraud, and potentially national security," Christie said.

In exchange for illicit cash payments from him, Flores confessed that DMV employees did any of the following: produced drivers' licenses for students of his, who were illegal aliens not entitled to such identification documents; completed written drivers' tests for his students; scheduled his students early for commercial driver's license (CDL) road test appointments; tested his students for CDLs without a road test appointment; and exercised leniency in grading the performance of his students.

Flores admitted that his involvement in the scheme lasted for a decade, from 1993 to 2003, and that he paid DMV employees on a weekly basis during that time. Flores said that the fraud involved DMV employees working at offices throughout New Jersey, including facilities in Springfield, Trenton, South Plainfield, Randolph, Edison, and Cherry Hill.

Flores was the 15th individual to plead guilty and be sentenced in connection with the driver's license fraud scheme, in which employees of the state agency and non-employees received hundreds of thousands of dollars to produce and procure licenses in an unlawful manner.

Others who pleaded guilty:

- Linda Love, of Willingboro, an examination technician at the MVC's Driver Testing Center in Mount Holly, admitted permitting individuals to take multiple written exams for licenses for other people. Love admitted to fraudulently generating more than 100 drivers' licenses over a

three-year period and receiving cash payments of about \$300 for each one. Love was sentenced to 30 months in prison.

- Tonya Horn, formerly of Scotch Plains and Easton, Pa., a service representative of the Springfield MVC office, admitted that she processed driver permits and licenses without ever having spoken with the respective applicants; she received between \$100 and \$150 for each of more than 100 fraudulent licenses. Horn was sentenced to 12 months in prison.
- Marcella Lewis, of Plainfield, an examination technician at the MVC office in Elizabeth, admitted permitting certain individuals to take multiple written examinations for drivers' licenses for other individuals, and receiving \$150 for each of more than 100 fraudulent licenses. Lewis was sentenced to 12 months.
- Sheilina D. Moore, of Clementon, a customer service representative at the MVC Mount Holly office, admitted receiving between \$100 and \$200 for each of more than 100 bogus licenses she helped produce. Moore was sentenced to 12 months in prison.
- Linda Carlo, of Newark, a customer service representative at the MVC Springfield office, admitted receiving \$100 for each of more than 100 bogus licenses she helped produce. Carlo was sentenced to 12 months.
- Lyliana Pablo, of Newark, a customer service representative at the MVC Springfield office, admitted receiving \$100 for each of more than 100 bogus licenses she helped produce. Pablo was sentenced to 33 months in prison.
- Anita Feathers, of Sloatzburg, N.Y., also a customer service representative at the MVC Springfield office, admitted receiving \$100 for each bogus license she helped produce. Feathers was sentenced to three years of probation with six months of house arrest.
- Barbara Carter, of Roselle Park, a customer service representative at DMV Plus, a private agency in Springfield, admitted to receiving \$500 for each bogus license and MVC identification card she conspired to produce with MVC employees at the Springfield office. Carter was sentenced to 18 months in prison.
- Rita Peterson, of Newark, a customer service representative at the MVC Springfield office, admitted receiving \$100 for each bogus license she helped produce. Peterson was sentenced to 12 months in prison.
- Lori Awan, of North Plainfield, a customer service representative at the MVC Springfield office, admitted receiving \$100 for each fraudulent license she helped generate. Awan was sentenced to three years of probation with six months of house arrest.
- Lauren Joyce, of Union Township, Union County, an MVC customer service representative at the Springfield office, admitted receiving up to \$150 for each license she helped to fraudulently produce. Joyce was sentenced to 12 months in prison.

- Juvenal Galarza, a/k/a "Uncle Johnny," formerly of Belleville, an owner of a driving school in Harrison, admitted to having fraudulently transferred between 25 and 99 drivers' licenses to illegal aliens and to receiving cash payments up to \$2,000 for each such license; Galarza stated that he made cash payments of \$100 to \$300 to each MVC employee who assisted in fraudulently generating a particular license. Galarza was sentenced to 12 months in prison.
- Martha Flores, of Warren, admitted paying \$100 to a customer service representative at the MVC Springfield office, for each bogus license she helped produce for Flores. Flores was sentenced to five years of probation with six months of house arrest.
- Paul Aroniss, of Trenton, an MVC road test examiner for CDLs at the Lawrenceville driver testing facility, admitted receiving more than \$30,000 in cash payments, i.e., \$100 for each road test appointment he scheduled early or that he administered without an appointment. Aroniss was sentenced to 12 months in prison.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI in Newark, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, for their work in developing the cases. The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Brian R. Howe, Deputy Chief of the U.S. Attorney's Special Prosecutions Unit in Newark.

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Defense Attorney for Flores - Paul J. Fishman, Esq., N.Y.