

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Former Passaic Councilman Jonathan Soto Indicted for
Attempting to Sell Influence and Attempted Drug Possession

(More)

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TRENTON – A federal grand jury today indicted former City of Passaic Councilman Jonathan Soto on charges of attempted extortion under color of official right and bribery for allegedly accepting \$22,000 in exchange for his influence on local government contracts, and for attempting to obtain illegal narcotics, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

The 15-count Indictment and its allegations largely mirror allegations contained in a criminal Complaint filed against Soto on Sept. 6, 2007. On that day, Soto and 10 other public officials and one private individual were arrested in a corruption investigation that ran from South to North New Jersey.

The Indictment does add two new misdemeanor charges of attempted drug possession against Soto, as described in Counts 14 and 15.

Soto, 32, will be arraigned on the Indictment over the course of the next 10 days or so, after the case is assigned to a U.S. District Judge and the arraignment is scheduled. Soto is currently free on \$200,000 bail in connection with the September 2007 criminal Complaint.

According to the Indictment, Soto allegedly accepted the bribes from representatives of an undercover FBI insurance company. Soto allegedly accepted the cash from two cooperating witnesses in exchange for assurances that he would influence City of Passaic officials to help secure insurance brokerage contracts for, among others, the undercover insurance company.

The Indictment also accuses Soto of conspiring with a high ranking City of Passaic official – identified only as Individual 1 in the Indictment – and others to obtain corrupt payments from the cooperating witnesses in exchange for Individual 1's assistance in obtaining insurance brokerage business with the City of Passaic for, among others, the undercover insurance company.

Finally, the Indictment charges that Soto attempted to acquire illegal narcotics in March and April, 2007.

The conspiracy and attempted extortion charges (Counts 1-7) carry 20-year statutory maximum prison sentences, the bribery charges (Counts 8-13) carry 10-year statutory maximums, and the attempted possession of narcotics charges (Counts 14-15) carry 1-year statutory maximums, respectively.

Despite indictment, defendant Soto is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, for the investigation leading to today's Indictment. He also credited prosecutors and investigators with the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Theodore F.L. Housel, for their assistance in the investigation.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Adam S. Lurie and David Bocian, of the Special Prosecutions Division.

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Defense counsel: Jose Luis Ongay, Esq. Philadelphia