

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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“INS” Agent Impersonator Pleads Guilty to Defrauding Immigrants of over \$150,000

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TRENTON – A serial “INS” agent impersonator pleaded guilty today to a federal charge of mail fraud for defrauding more than 20 immigrants of more than \$150,000 over a period of three years, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., announced.

Michael Ruiz, 45, of Newark, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Freda L. Wolfson to a one-count Information that charges him with mail fraud. Judge Wolfson continued the defendant’s detention pending sentencing, which is scheduled for Jan. 15.

At his plea hearing, Ruiz, who has never been a federal employee, admitted that from March 2005 through June 2008, he operated a scheme to defraud immigrants to the United States. Ruiz admitted that he approached and introduced himself, under a false name, to immigrants and told them that he worked for “INS” or some other federal immigration authority, and offer a variety of immigration services for a fee, none of which he was in a position to provide. Those services included obtaining immigration and other documents, such as “green cards,” work permits, and social security cards, for the duped immigrants, Ruiz admitted. Ruiz also offered to arrange for the immigrants’ family members to enter the United States, and he represented that he could broker the purchase of discounted government-seized vehicles and homes. Ruiz admitted that all of these representations were lies.

According to Ruiz, he instructed certain immigrants to pay for these fake services by providing money orders directly to him. Other immigrants, he stated, were instructed to pay for these fake services by purchasing money orders made payable to “INS” and mailing these money orders to the immigration offices. With respect to these latter money orders, Ruiz admitted that he stole the money orders from the immigrants and then altered them to make them appear payable to him. He would then cash these money orders for himself and render no services to the immigrants.

Ruiz admitted to a sampling of five specific acts set forth in the Information. For example, in March 2007, Ruiz told an immigrant, identified only as “A.A.,” that his name was “Michael Silva,” that he worked for “INS,” and that he could obtain INS documents, green cards, social security cards, and other documents. He also told A.A. that he could bring A.A.’s wife and child to the United States from Brazil in exchange for approximately \$13,800. Ruiz admitted that A.A. gave him the money and that he kept it for himself.

The charge of mail fraud carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000 or twice the aggregate loss to the victims or gain to the defendant.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Wolfson will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into

account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, 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 that time.

Marra credited Special Agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Professional Responsibility under the direction of Special Agent in Charge, Steven J. Mocsary, for the investigation leading to the guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott B. McBride of the U.S. Attorney's Government Fraud Unit.

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Defense Attorney: Patrick N. McMahon, Esq. Assistant Federal Public Defender