

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Ridgefield Mayor and Associate Indicted for Alleged Extortion Conspiracy

(More)

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NEWARK – Ridgefield Mayor Anthony R. Suarez was indicted today for his alleged agreement to accept a corrupt payment made in exchange for his willingness to provide official assistance on real estate development matters in Ridgefield, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Also charged in the same Indictment was Vincent Tabbachino, 68, of Fairview, a former member of the Guttenberg Board of Education, who is accused of having accepted \$10,000 in cash from a cooperating witness (CW) to be funneled to Suarez's legal defense fund. Tabbachino was also indicted for money laundering as part of a separate scheme he is accused of engaging in with the CW.

The Indictment charges that Suarez, 43, conspired with Tabbachino to extort a cash payment from the CW in exchange for helping the CW obtain development approvals in Ridgefield. Suarez allegedly agreed to have a \$10,000 cash payment provided to Tabbachino by the CW from which Tabbachino wrote a \$2,500 check from his business account in June 2009 for the benefit of Suarez, thereby disguising the true origin of the payment. Tabbachino allegedly made the check payable from his company, Tabbachino Associates, to a legal defense fund which had been established on behalf of Suarez to defray the mayor's personal expenses related to a civil lawsuit. According to the Indictment, Suarez directed that the payment be made to his legal defense fund to, in part, avoid reporting requirements for public officials.

Tabbachino was indicted on three counts of money laundering. Those counts charge that from between February 2009 through July 2009, Tabbachino accepted three checks from the CW totaling \$100,000 believing that the checks represented profits from the CW's purported counterfeit handbag business. Tabbachino in turn provided cash to the CW, believing that he was helping to disguise the CW's illegal profits. Tabbachino allegedly retained an approximate 10-percent commission for engaging in these transactions.

The Indictment stems from an undercover FBI political corruption and international money laundering investigation that became public on July 23. Suarez and Tabbachino were both arrested on criminal Complaints on that day.

Fishman said the corruption and money laundering investigations are continuing.

According to the Indictment, Suarez and Tabbachino met with the CW on May 18 and May 27, 2009, when Suarez was informed that the CW was seeking Suarez's assistance with obtaining real estate development approvals in Ridgefield. On May 18, Suarez was informed by the CW that the CW would be providing Tabbachino with \$10,000 in cash in the parking lot of the restaurant where they had just concluded lunch.

Suarez allegedly assured the CW that the money would go to an account which did not get reported to the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission, the state agency to which public officials must report campaign contributions. On May 27, Suarez confirmed that he had received a \$10,000 check from Tabbachino but indicated that he had yet to do anything with the

check. When Suarez momentarily excused himself, Tabbachino informed the CW that Suarez was “super scared” that the CW was “wired,” and assured the CW that Suarez would assist the CW in expediting the CW’s approvals.

In a phone call on June 25, 2009, Tabbachino informed the CW that he had provided a replacement check of \$2,500 to defendant Suarez and was holding onto the remaining \$7,500 for the moment at defendant Suarez’s direction. Defendant Tabbachino boasted that the arrangement had worked well in terms of disguising the actual origin of the money because defendant Suarez’s political opponents were attempting to get hold of the list of individuals who had made donations to Suarez’s defense fund. Records confirmed that a \$2,500 check from Tabbachino Associates had been deposited into defendant Suarez’s defense fund in June of 2009.

The Indictment charges Suarez and Tabbachino with one count of conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right, which carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, and one count of attempted extortion, which carries the same maximum penalties.

Suarez is also charged with one count of accepting a corrupt payment, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Tabbachino is also charged with one count of giving and offering to give a corrupt payment to Suarez, a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Finally, each of the three money laundering counts against Tabbachino carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Despite indictment, all defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Fishman credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, and IRS Criminal Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge William P. Offord, for the investigation of Anthony R. Suarez and Vincent Tabbachino. and the other defendants.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark J. McCarren

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Defense counsel:

For Suarez: Michael Critchley, Esq. and John Vazquez, Esq. Roseland

For Tabbachino: Anthony Kress, Esq., Hackensack