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For Immediate Release

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COUNCIL MEMBER'S CHIEF OF STAFF, REAL ESTATE DEVELOPERS, AND ATTORNEY CHARGED WITH CORRUPTION

PHILADELPHIA - Acting United States Attorney Laurie Magid and Special Agent-in-Charge of the FBI Janice Fedarcyk today announced the filing of an indictment¹ charging Christopher Wright, chief of staff to a Philadelphia city council member, real estate developers Hardeep Chawla and Ravinder S. Chawla, and their attorney, Andrew Teitelman, in an honest services fraud conspiracy. The indictment alleges that from June 2005 to January 2008, Wright used his official position with city council to give special treatment to the developers and Teitelman in exchange for approximately \$16,000 in cash and other gifts, including a free apartment in Philadelphia's prestigious Rittenhouse Square area and a free parking space. Wright also received free legal services from Teitelman. According to the indictment, in an e-mail dated November 2006, Ravinder Chawla offered to retain Wright as "Our Consultant." In March 2007, Wright sent an e-mail about a real estate project to Ravinder Chawla and signed it, "Your Public Servant."

"According to this indictment, Wright was bought by the Chawlas so that he would serve their interests, and ultimately his own, instead of the public's," said Magid. "When we talk about 'honest services' we are talking about the minimum owed to the taxpayers – in this case the citizens of Philadelphia – by their public officials. It means that an elected or appointed official cannot use his or her office for private gain nor can the official accept any gift, monetary or otherwise, in exchange for some sort of official action. But when those honest services are corrupted, regardless of the amount of money, we all lose."

"Public corruption remains our top criminal investigative priority, and cases like this demonstrate the FBI's commitment to rooting out these criminal schemes that can only serve to erode public confidence and undermine the strength of our government institutions that form the structure of our democracy," said Janice K. Fedarcyk, special agent in charge of the Philadelphia Division of the FBI.

¹An Indictment or Information is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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As the indictment alleges, in June 2005, Hardeep Chawla asked Wright to intervene with the Philadelphia Law Department in order to reduce the amount of an outstanding and overdue tax bill of \$53,000 for his company, Sant Properties. Wright succeeded and later that year in December, as a thank you and in an effort to secure future cooperation, the Chawlas gave Wright a check for one thousand dollars. On the memo line of the check, a note read, "Happy Holidays '05" followed by a smiley face.

On January 17, 2006, three weeks after Wright received the \$1,000 check, Hardeep Chawla came to Wright for help. Hardeep Chawla pleaded guilty in federal court in connection with a separate case prosecuted in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Sentencing was scheduled to take place in April 2006. On January 18th, in an attempt to receive a reduced sentence from the judge assigned to his case, Chawla sought the assistance of family members, friends, professional colleagues, and members of city government, including the councilman for whom Wright worked, by asking them to write letters attesting to Hardeep Chawla's personal character. On January 27th, Teitelman e-mailed a draft of a letter of reference to Wright and the Chawlas. The letter was purported to be from the councilman but had actually been drafted by Teitelman. The letter was later reviewed by the councilman and Wright and submitted to the court.

In May 2006, Ravinder Chawla and Teitelman, aware that Wright needed a place to live because of marital and financial difficulties, offered him the opportunity to live rent-free in a Delancey Street apartment in Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square area; an offer which Wright accepted. Chawla and Teitelman then implemented a scheme to place Wright in the apartment, which came with a free parking space, by playing the real estate version of a "shell game" with sellers and buyers of the building to ensure that Wright continued to live rent-free.

One month after allowing Wright the use of the apartment, the Chawlas came to collect, this time in the form of help from Wright in obtaining legislation allowing real estate developers, like the defendants, to implement mechanical parking garages for certain multi-family buildings *without* first having to seek permission from the zoning authorities or city council.

In addition, in July 2006, while Wright continued to enjoy the free usage of the Delancey Street apartment and associated parking space, he began discussions with Ravinder Chawla regarding how he could assist with, among other things, securing buyers for the Philadelphia River City Project, a Chawla development project.

In March 2007, when the new owner of the building on Delancey Street began eviction proceedings against Wright, Teitelman provided free legal services throughout the eviction process. Also, in order to assure that Wright would protect the business interests of the Chawlas within city government, Teitelman, agreed to represent Wright for free in divorce proceedings and other legal matters.

“This case shows that corruption does not take place in a vacuum,” said Magid. “We have a responsibility to hold accountable not only our public officials but also those who seek to corrupt them. Both sides are getting something out of this kind of a relationship and ultimately it’s the citizens of Philadelphia who are cheated. For the taxpayers, honest services are a right, not a bonus.”

INFORMATION REGARDING THE DEFENDANTS

NAME	ADDRESS	AGE OR DATE OF BIRTH
Christopher Wright	Millbrook Rd., Phila.	44
Andrew Teitelman	Brentwood Ct, Newtown, Pa.	49
Ravinder Chawla	Huntingdon Rd. Abington, Pa.	58
Hardeep Chawla	Kasi Circle, Ivyland, Pa.	46

If convicted of all charges, defendant Wright faces a maximum possible sentence of 245 years incarceration and a \$3,250,000 fine; defendant Teitelman faces a maximum possible sentence of 165 years incarceration and a \$2,250,000 fine; defendant Ravinder Chawla faces a maximum possible sentence of 225 years incarceration and a \$3,000,000 fine; and defendant Hardeep Chawla faces a maximum possible sentence of 65 years incarceration, and a \$1,000,000 fine.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Michael Bresnick and Jennifer Arbittier Williams.

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