

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Former Passaic Councilman Jonathan Soto Convicted on All Counts

(More)

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TRENTON – A jury today convicted former Passaic Councilman Jonathan Soto on all 23 counts against him in a Superseding Indictment charging him with bribery, extortion and attempted drug possession, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., announced.

Soto, 33, was convicted on numerous counts for accepting \$44,500 in bribes for himself, former Passaic Mayor Samuel Rivera and former Passaic Councilman Marcellus Jackson from representatives of an undercover FBI insurance company. The payments were in exchange for Soto's official assistance in securing contracts and other business for the undercover company from Passaic government entities.

Soto was also convicted on one count of conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right for his role in a corrupt agreement with other public officials, including Rivera, Jackson and Pleasantville Board of Education member Jayson Adams. Soto was additionally convicted on two counts related to his solicitation of \$10,000 from a City of Passaic employee in exchange for a civil service promotion. Lastly, Soto was convicted on counts related to attempts to possess illegal drugs.

Testimony in the trial began on Feb. 18. Following the completion of closing arguments this morning, the jury began deliberating around noon and returned its verdicts approximately four hours later.

The case was tried by Assistant U.S. Attorneys David Bocian and Hope Olds of the Special Prosecutions division.

Following the verdicts, U.S. District Judge Anne E. Thompson scheduled sentencing for June 5, and ordered that Soto be confined to his home with electronic monitoring until his sentencing.

“Like so many others we've encountered in this investigation, Soto leveraged his position as an elected official and sold his office for cash,” said Marra. “We are gratified that the jury recognized this and convicted Soto on all counts.”

Soto was originally named in a 15-count Indictment, returned on January 30, 2008, that charged him with extortion, bribery, conspiracy, and attempted drug possession in connection with his acceptance of the \$22,000 in exchange for his influence on local government contracts. In addition to being a councilman for the City of Passaic, Soto was also the chairman of the City of Passaic Redevelopment Agency.

A Superseding Indictment added eight additional counts of bribery and attempted extortion. Soto was convicted on all 23 counts: nine counts of attempted extortion under color of official right, nine counts of bribery and one count of conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right related to the cash-for-contracts scheme; one count

of attempted extortion under color of official right and one count of bribery related to the attempt to obtain money from the City of Passaic employee; and two counts of attempting to possess illegal drugs.

On the attempted extortion counts and the conspiracy count, Soto faces a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. The bribery counts carry a maximum statutory penalties of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, with the investigation of Soto. He also credited the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Theodore F.L. Housel, for their participation in the investigation.

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Defense Attorney: José L. Ongay, Esq. Philadelphia