

Department of Justice

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Western District of New York

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MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO BRIBING A PUBLIC OFFICIAL

BUFFALO, N.Y. - U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Joe Phouthavongsa, 49, of Rochester, NY, pleaded guilty to bribing a public official before U.S. District Court Judge Richard J. Arcara. The charge carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison, a fine of \$250,000 or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Russell T. Ippolito, Jr., who is handling the case, stated that Phouthavongsa gave an immigration official \$5,000 in cash to pass two other unnamed individuals on an English language proficiency examination used in the naturalization process to obtain United States citizenship. Under-cover law enforcement officers acted as immigration officials who were willing to accept a cash bribe in return for facilitating the naturalization of the associates of the two men. Phouthavongsa was arrested outside the U.S. Courthouse, along with co-defendant Sengchanh Sengsavath, after being told to appear there for a feigned naturalization ceremony for their associates. Phouthavongsa is a United States citizen who was originally born in the country of Laos.

The plea is the culmination of an investigation by Special Agents of the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Gregory K. Knull and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Christopher M. Piehota.

Sentencing is scheduled for January 23, 2012 at 12:30 p.m. before Judge Arcara