

Department of Justice

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Western District of New York

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FLORIDA WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO BANK FRAUD

BUFFALO, N.Y.—The United States Attorney's Office announced today that Michelle Vinas, 53, of Florida, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Richard J. Arcara to bank fraud. The charge carries a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison, a \$1,000,000 fine, or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Trini E. Ross, who is handling the case, stated that the defendant was an employee of the Federal Guaranty Mortgage Company in Florida. As an underwriter of mortgages, Vinas's responsibilities included reviewing completed loan applications, including supporting documentation, as well as verification of the information included on the applications. Between February 2005 and October 2008, Vinas submitted loan applications to financial institutions, including M&T Bank, knowing that the information she certified as true was inaccurate. If the defendant had not certified the loan applications, banks would not have funded the mortgages. As a result, M&T Bank sustained losses totaling \$4,407,515.48. The total loss to all financial institutions affected by the fraudulent scheme was approximately \$24,000,000 .

This law enforcement action is part of President Barack Obama's Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force. President Obama established the interagency Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force to wage an aggressive, coordinated and proactive effort to investigate and prosecute financial crimes. The task force includes representatives from a broad range of federal agencies, regulatory authorities, inspectors general, and state and local law enforcement who, working together, bring to bear a powerful array of criminal and civil enforcement resources. The task force is working to improve efforts across the federal executive branch, and with state and local partners, to investigate and prosecute significant financial crimes, ensure just and effective punishment for those who perpetrate financial crimes, combat discrimination in the lending and financial markets, and recover proceeds for victims of financial crimes.

The plea is the result of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Christopher M. Piehota as part of the Mortgage Fraud Task Force of WNY which includes agents and personnel from; U.S. Postal Inspection Service under the direction of Inspector in Charge Robert Bethel; the Housing and Urban Development Office of Inspector General under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Steven Perez; the United States Secret Service under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Tracy Gast; and the Internal Revenue Service under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Charles R. Pine. The Mortgage Fraud Task Force of WNY is led by the U.S. Attorney's Office and also includes Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General and the U.S. Bankruptcy Trustee.

Sentencing is scheduled for April 5, 2012, at 12:30 p.m. EST, in Buffalo, N.Y., before Judge Arcara.

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