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News Releases

JANUARY 21, 2011 PROVIDENCE, RI

Rhode Island man sentenced for defrauding immigrants by posing as an attorney, federal agent

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — A Pawtucket, R.I., man was sentenced Friday in U.S. District Court in Providence to six months in federal prison; three years supervised release; and ordered to pay \$8,700 in restitution to two victims he defrauded while posing as an immigration attorney; and claiming he was a federal immigration agent, threatening to have individuals deported. The sentence is the result of an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations.

Audeliz Villegas, 45, who was also known by several aliases, pleaded guilty in federal court in June to four counts of wire fraud and one count of impersonating a federal agent.



The sentence, which was imposed by U.S. District Court Chief Judge Mary M. Lisi, was announced by U.S. Attorney for the District of Rhode Island Peter F. Neronha; Bruce M. Foucart, special agent in charge of ICE HSI in Boston; and Colonel Brendan P. Doherty, superintendent of the Rhode Island State Police.

At Villegas' change of plea hearing in June, Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary Rogers told the court that in November and December 2009, Villegas devised a scheme to defraud individuals, many of them immigrants seeking legal services by claiming he was an attorney licensed to practice in New York. Throughout the scheme, in addition to showing victims documentation purporting to be connected to his law practice, Villegas showed the victims forged documents purporting to be documents filed in federal court, with forged signatures of a purported magistrate judge. These documents purported to grant relief to the victims.

Rogers also told the court that the government was prepared to provide evidence that in addition to the false promises and statements made to his victims, Villegas defrauded his victims out of a total \$8,290. When his victims confronted him, he responded by sending a text message in which he claimed to be an immigration agent and that they had committed a federal offense and would be arrested. When

one of the victims followed up with a telephone call to Villegas, he had placed a recording with the message that the phone was the property of Homeland Security.

The matter was investigated by ICE HSI with the assistance of the Pawtucket Police Department, Rhode Island State Police, the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office Bureau of Criminal Identification and the State Police Fusion Center.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

ICE is a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities. For more information, visit www.ICE.gov. To report suspicious activity, call 1-866-347-2423.