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News Releases



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Imposter attorney ordered to pay \$100,000 to victims of latest immigration scam Serial fraudster's restitution tab now totals \$750,000 and involves more than 100 victims

SAN DIEGO — A 45-year-old serial immigration fraudster, who was convicted last month of felony theft in state court for a third time, has been ordered to pay more than \$100,000 in restitution to the victims of her latest immigration fraud scheme.

The restitution order is the most recent action against Bemilda "Linda" Asuncion Ruiz stemming from a lengthy probe by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in San Diego. Monday a superior court judge ordered the San Diego woman to repay thousands of dollars to 20 victims she defrauded between 2010 and 2012.

Following her arrest by HSI special agents in December 2012, Ruiz admitted to charging clients for legal services while posing as an immigration attorney. Ruiz promised to get the clients work permits and driver's licenses and other immigration benefits. Most of her victims were illegal immigrants, but they also included a legal resident who was applying for U.S. citizenship. In addition, several people paid her to get immigration benefits for family members.

Earlier this year, Ruiz was convicted in superior court in San Diego of two counts of felony grand theft and sentenced to five years in state prison, which she is currently serving.

"This case is an egregious example of a serial fraudster who had no qualms about exploiting illegal immigrants for financial gain," said Derek Benner, special agent in charge for HSI San Diego. "The persistent investigative work by HSI special agents has rooted out a particularly stubborn immigration scam in which a significant number of individuals were defrauded. Our work will continue, however, until each of the victims gets back the hard earned money they paid for what proved to be broken promises."

Investigators say Ruiz began operating her phony immigration business in 1999. Over the course of the next six years, she defrauded dozens of victims until her 2005 arrest by HSI special agents. Following that arrest, Ruiz was convicted in state court on five counts of felony grand theft and sentenced to one year in county jail. In addition, a superior court judge ordered Ruiz to pay more than \$50,000 in restitution to her victims.

While Ruiz was out on bail in that case, she continued defrauding people so she could pay the restitution she owed to her first group of victims.

HSI special agents continued investigating the suspected fraud and served Ruiz with an arrest warrant in August 2006, prior to her release from jail. For the second time, Ruiz was convicted after pleading guilty to multiple counts of identity theft in state court. In April 2007, she was sentenced to four years in state prison and directed to pay nearly \$600,000 as part of her second restitution order. Ruiz was released from criminal custody in August 2009 and by January 2010 she had revived her immigration scam.

All told, over the course of the last eight years, Ruiz has been ordered to pay more than \$750,000 in restitution to more than 100 victims identified during the course of three separate HSI investigations.

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