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Tijuana man who posed as immigration attorney arrested for defrauding clients

SAN DIEGO – A Tijuana man who allegedly posed as an immigration attorney has been arrested on state charges for defrauding at least two individuals as part of a scam to collect fees for phony immigration-related legal services while working at an office in San Ysidro.

Alberto Rodrigo Garcia, 50, of Tijuana, Mexico, was taken into custody Thursday at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry by special agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). Garcia is expected to be arraigned in state court Monday on felony charges of grand theft and practicing law without a license.

"Our office does not tolerate scammers who take advantage of innocent victims," said San Diego County District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis. "Our Economic Crimes Unit does an outstanding job prosecuting these types of cases and bringing a measure of justice to those who were defrauded."

After receiving a tip, HSI began investigating Garcia in May. So far, the probe has identified two victims who paid more than \$5,000 for what they believed were legitimate immigration services rendered by Garcia. Special agents suspect others may have fallen prey to the same scam.

"Protecting the integrity of the nation's immigration system is a top priority for HSI," said Derek Benner, special agent in charge for HSI San Diego. "As part of our ongoing efforts to protect the community from immigration fraudsters, we are seeking the public's assistance to help identify other potential victims."

Anyone with information that may be related to this case is asked to call 619-550-5183.

According to a case affidavit, Garcia met with at least two victims on separate occasions and offered to file paperwork to legally immigrate one man's spouse and another man's fiancée. As part of his illegitimate immigration-related services, Garcia advertised using business cards that identified his business as a professional attorney service. He also provided receipts with stamps that identified him as the owner of Alberto R. Garcia, Inc. Garcia is also a licensed tax preparer.

During ensuing meetings, the victims reported they gave Garcia personal documents, such as birth and marriage certificates, passport photos, and payments to file the required paperwork. When one of the victims subsequently went to the San Ysidro office to ask about the status of his case, he was advised that Garcia no longer worked there, but had opened a new office near the U.S. Consulate in Tijuana.

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

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