



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

USCIS Efforts in Florida Lead to Successful sentencing of Fake Immigration Attorney

TAMPA – The efforts of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services led to the successful sentencing of a Tampa-area woman on September 18 to six months confinement, six months home detention and three years of probation for falsely using official seals of the United States. Maria Virginia Constantinou pleaded guilty on May 29 to falsely using the seal of the Department of Homeland Security to perpetuate her unlicensed practice of immigration law and defrauding dozens of victims to pay her “legal fees” to help them obtain lawful immigration status.

USCIS learned about Constantinou’s activities from a tip from the local American Immigration Lawyers Association. That tip was investigated by USCIS’ Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate and resulted in subsequent charges against Constantinou. Tampa and Orlando FDNS worked with agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement to bring the case to prosecution.

“We at USCIS are proud to have generated this case for successful prosecution,” said Kimberly Dean, Chief of FDNS in the Southeast Region. “Constantinou victimized immigrants for personal gain and misrepresented USCIS. We are committed to combatting deceptive practices to ensure the integrity of our nation’s immigration system.”

According to court documents, Constantinou presented herself to immigrants in the Tampa Bay and Orlando areas as an attorney who could assist them with immigration proceedings with the U.S. government. In reality, Constantinou is not a licensed attorney.

Constantinou accepted payment from her victims based on the false statement that she would submit immigration paperwork for them. Constantinou would then produce documents that appeared to be from USCIS to the victims to make them believe she had submitted paperwork on their behalf. These documents were false and contained false seals of the United States. Constantinou never submitted paperwork to USCIS on behalf of her victims.

USCIS launched an initiative to combat the Unauthorized Practice of Immigration Law with the goal of equipping applicants, legal service providers and community-based organizations with the knowledge and tools they need to detect and protect themselves from dishonest practices. Visit www.uscis.gov/avoidscams for more information.

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