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### Final defendant sentenced in ICE HSI University of Farmington investigation

DETROIT—Eight individuals from around the country who were charged with conspiracy to commit visa fraud and harboring aliens for profit, have been sentenced, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

United States Attorney Matthew Schneider announced the sentencing with HSI Detroit Special Agent in Charge Vance Callender.

"Today's sentencing of the final criminal defendant in HSI's University of Farmington investigation makes it unequivocally clear that every individual who participated in this scheme knew it was an illegal pay-to-stay scam," said Vance Callender, HSI Detroit special agent in charge. "Building off lessons learned from the September 11 attacks, HSI is dedicated to protecting the homeland in part by ensuring the integrity of the Student Visa Program so it can continue to benefit everyone. Unscrupulous schools whose sole motive is profit and not education do exist and this investigation not only exposed these types of criminals, but has helped create a feeling of omnipresence by law enforcement that will make others think twice before exploiting the program."

Sentenced were:

- Barath Kakireddy, 30, of Lake Mary, Florida, sentenced to 18 months;
- Suresh Kandala, 32, of Culpeper, Virginia, sentenced to 18 months;
- Phanideep Karnati, 36, of Louisville, sentenced to 6 months;
- Prem Rampeesa, 27, of Charlotte, sentenced to 12 months and one day;
- Santosh Sama, 29, of Fremont, California, sentenced to 24 months;
- Avinash Thakkallapally, 29, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, sentenced to 15 months
- Aswanth Nune, 27, of Atlanta, sentenced to 12 months and one day;
- Naveen Prathipati, 27, of Dallas, sentenced to 12 months and one day

According to court records, from approximately February 2017 through January 2019, the defendants, a group of foreign citizens, conspired with each other and others to fraudulently facilitate hundreds of foreign nationals in illegally remaining and working in the United States by actively recruiting them to

**AIILA Doc. No. 19121308. (Posted 1/30/20)**

enroll into a metro Detroit private university that, unbeknownst to the conspirators, was operated by HSI special agents as part of an undercover operation. As part of the scheme, the defendants/recruiters assisted foreign citizen “students” in fraudulently obtaining immigration documents from the school and facilitated the creation of false student records, including transcripts, for the purpose of deceiving immigration authorities. The illegal documents obtained as a result of the conspirators’ actions were based on false claims, false statements, and fraud since the purported foreign students had no intention of attending school, nor attended a single class, and were not bona fide students. All participants in the scheme knew that the school had no instructors or actual classes. The defendants intended to help shield and hide their customers/”students” from United States immigration authorities for money and collectively profited in excess of a quarter of a million dollars as a result of their scheme.

“As this case shows, the well-intended international student visa program can be exploited and abused,” stated United States Attorney Matthew Schneider. “These foreign “students” weren’t students at all – they were scam artists trying to stay in our country illegally, and they all fully knew there were no classes to attend.”

Since 2015, the case was investigated by special agents from HSI Detroit.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ronald Waterstreet, Timothy McDonald and Brandon Helms with the United States Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Michigan in Detroit.

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Last Reviewed/Updated: 01/30/2020