

NEWS

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Former New Brunswick Official Already Serving Prison Sentence
Charged with Murder-for-Hire Plot Targeting His Wife

(More)

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NEWARK – A former New Brunswick official serving a federal prison sentence for accepting more than \$30,000 in bribes was charged today with attempting to hire a hit man to murder his wife, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Richard Kaplan, 58, of New Brunswick, allegedly pursued the murder-for-hire plot through a fellow inmate at the Federal Correctional Institution in Fairton in Cumberland County. The fellow inmate alerted authorities and became a cooperating witness in the FBI undercover investigation, leading to the new charges against Kaplan.

Kaplan, formerly a New Brunswick city construction inspector and zoning officer, is currently serving a 30-month sentence at Fairton for his guilty plea on April 20, 2007, to taking more than \$30,000 in bribes. Kaplan is scheduled to make an initial appearance today at 2:30 p.m. before U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark Falk.

In a criminal Complaint unsealed today, Kaplan is charged with using the mail (a facility of interstate commerce) in the commission of murder for hire. The maximum statutory penalty is 10 years in federal prison.

“If not for an undercover FBI agent stepping into Kaplan’s plot, it’s clear that he intended to carry it out,” said Christie. “That makes him an extremely unrepentant felon who has now compounded his troubles and potential time in federal prison.”

“Mr. Kaplan is so far removed from acceptance of responsibility and the concepts of putting the greater good above all else that he contracted to have his wife killed simply to satisfy his own needs for control and revenge,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun.

Kaplan wanted his wife dead because she was divorcing him, due to money issues and the belief that she was “conspiring” with her family against Kaplan since he entered prison last October, following his sentencing on Sept. 6, according to the Complaint.

Not long after arriving at the prison, Kaplan began asking the fellow inmate regularly whether the inmate knew anyone who could kill Kaplan’s wife and make it look like an accident, according to the Complaint. Kaplan told the fellow inmate that he was willing to pay \$25,000 to \$30,000 – including a good-faith down payment of \$2,000 – for the murder. Kaplan allegedly said that if the fellow inmate was able to find someone to kill his wife, he’d like to meet that person at the prison during inmate visiting hours.

Kaplan told his fellow inmate – and later an undercover FBI agent whom Kaplan believed was the hit man he was hiring – that he wanted his wife to be killed in a staged car accident, according to the Complaint, which includes excerpts from audio- and video-

recorded meetings with Kaplan.

During a March 30 meeting with the “hit man” at the federal prison, Kaplan allegedly said he would pay the remaining balance of the murder-for-hire fee when he got out of jail on furlough for his wife’s funeral.

Kaplan allegedly sent a letter to a post office box instructing the “hit man” – for whom Kaplan had made up the name “Robert Grooms” – that he wanted to go forward with the plan to kill his wife. He allegedly sent a second letter to his accountant and set a meeting date and place – a Boston Market restaurant in New Brunswick – for the accountant to deliver the \$2,000 down payment to “Grooms.” In the letter, Kaplan told the accountant to wear certain distinctive clothing so the hit man would recognize him, according to the Complaint. Kaplan also falsely told the accountant that the man he was meeting was a private investigator he hired “... to check up on [my wife] in case I need something on her for my divorce....”

At the conclusion of the letter to the accountant, Kaplan wrote, “P.S. Destroy this letter.”

On March 20, the accountant met the undercover FBI agent in New Brunswick and gave the agent the \$2,000 cash down payment from Kaplan, according to the Complaint.

Finally, on March 30, Kaplan met with the undercover agent at the federal prison and reiterated his desire to have his wife murdered. Among other things, Kaplan allegedly told the undercover agent that he understood that once the “hit man” left the prison, the murder was a done deal. That conversation was audio and video recorded, according to the Complaint.

A criminal Complaint is merely an accusation. All defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, and Special Agents of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Rene Febles, with the investigation leading to the charges against Kaplan. Christie also thanked the federal Bureau of Prisons, specifically officials at Fairton, for their assistance as well as assistance from the New Brunswick Police Department.

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