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PRESS RELEASE

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Maryland Man Pleads Guilty in Bribery Scheme Aimed at Dominating District of Columbia's Taxicab Industry - Scheme Involved \$360,000 in Illegal Payments -

WASHINGTON - Yitbarek Syume, 53, of Silver Spring, Maryland, pleaded guilty today to conspiring to commit bribery, bribery and mail fraud charges stemming from his scheme to dominate the taxicab market in the District of Columbia.

The guilty pleas were announced by U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr., James W. McJunkin, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office, and Cathy L. Lanier, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department.

Syume, who ran a taxicab business, entered his guilty pleas this afternoon in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia before the Honorable Senior Judge Paul L. Friedman. No sentencing date was scheduled. Syume faces up to 45 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$1 million. Under federal sentencing guidelines, the likely range is 87 to 108 months imprisonment.

In connection with his guilty plea, Syume admitted that he participated in two bribery schemes.

First, he admitted to conspiring to bribe public officials in an effort to obtain multi-vehicle taxicab company licenses in a scheme that lasted from September 2007 until September 2009. In this scheme, Syume admitted to simultaneously paying bribes in an attempt to influence legislation that would increase the value of those licenses. In sum, Syume and his associates were attempting to corner the taxicab market in the District of Columbia. This scheme involved approximately \$270,000 in illegal payments and attempted illegal payments.

Second, Syume admitted to conspiring to bribe a public official to obtain taxicab operator's licenses in September 2009. This scheme involved approximately \$90,000 in bribes.

In a third and unrelated scheme, Syume also admitted to defrauding the New York State Insurance Fund of more than \$100,000, by filing false worker's compensation claims.

Syume has been in custody since his arrest in October 2009.

Sixteen other people have pleaded guilty to charges in the overall investigation, including the former chief of staff of a District of Columbia Council member.

"This investigation uncovered a pervasive scheme to take over the taxicab industry in the District of Columbia through bribery and corruption," said U.S. Attorney Machen. "Today's plea by Mr. Syume, one of the ringleaders, was a big step forward in dismantling this scheme and protecting District of Columbia taxpayers."

"Bribery and corruption by public officials undermine the principles that support our democratic system and wear down the people's confidence in our government," said Assistant Director McJunkin. "The FBI works to hold accountable corrupt politicians and those who would bribe them. This case is an example of that hard work."

In announcing today's guilty pleas, U.S. Attorney Machen, Assistant Director McJunkin, and Chief Lanier commended the work of the FBI Special Agents on the case and those who worked on the case for MPD, including Sgt. Andrew Struhar and Detective Joseph Sopata. They also acknowledged the efforts of Special Agent Elliott Taylor, of the D.C. Office of Inspector General, and the staff of the U.S. Attorney's Office, including Paralegals Jeannette Litz, Carolyn Cody, Sarah Reis, and Jared Forney. Finally, they commended the work of Assistant U.S. Attorneys John Crabb Jr. and John Griffith, who are prosecuting the case.

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