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PRESS RELEASE

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Area Men Plead Guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Bribery

WASHINGTON - Berhane Leghese, 45, of Arlington, Va., and Amanuel Ghirmazion, 52, of Washington, D.C., pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to conspiring to commit bribery.

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 (MPD).

Leghese and Ghirmazion, both of whom were involved in the taxicab industry, entered their guilty pleas today before the Honorable Paul L. Friedman, Senior United States District Judge. No sentencing dates have been scheduled. Leghese and Ghirmazion each faces up to five years imprisonment and a fine of up to a \$250,000. Under the federal sentencing guidelines, each faces a likely sentencing guidelines range of 70 to 87 months imprisonment.

In connection with their guilty pleas, Leghese and Ghirmazion 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. This scheme involved approximately \$270,000 in illegal payments and attempted illegal payments.

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

In announcing today's guilty pleas, U.S. Attorney Machen, Assistant Director in Charge McJunkin, and Chief Lanier commended the work of the FBI Special Agents on the case, MPD Sergeant Andrew Struhar, MPD Detective Joseph Sopata and Special Agent Elliott Taylor of the District of Columbia Office of Inspector General. They also acknowledged the efforts of 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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