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FORMER CHICAGO LAWYER SENTENCED TO 15 YEARS IN PRISON FOR MORTGAGE FRAUD INVOLVING AT LEAST 102 FRAUDULENT “BAILOUTS”

CHICAGO — A former Chicago lawyer was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison for engaging in mortgage and bankruptcy fraud schemes involving a so-called “mortgage bailout” program that purported to “rescue” financially-distressed homeowners but instead tricked victims into relinquishing title to their homes and declaring bankruptcy. The defendant, **Norton Helton**, participated in at least 102 fraudulent mortgage bailout transactions and more than a dozen fraudulent bankruptcies in 2004 and 2005. He was ordered to pay more than \$3.2 million in mandatory restitution to various lenders and financial institutions that were not repaid by the borrowers or fully recovered through subsequent foreclosure sales, federal law enforcement officials announced today.

Helton, 50, of Atlanta and formerly of Chicago, was sentenced Wednesday by U.S. District Judge Samuel Der-Yeghiayan in Federal Court in Chicago. He was ordered to begin serving his sentence in June.

Helton and two co-defendants, **Charles White** and **Felicia Ford**, were convicted of multiple fraud counts following a five-week trial in June and July 2010. White, 43, of Chicago, was

sentenced late last year to more than 22 years in prison, while Ford, 39, of Chicago, is awaiting sentencing next month.

White owned and operated Eyes Have Not Seen (EHNS), which purported to offer insolvent homeowners mortgage bailout services that would prevent them from losing their homes in foreclosure by selling their property to third-party investors for whom the defendants fraudulently obtained mortgage financing. The victim-clients were assured they could continue living in their homes rent and mortgage-free for a year while they attempted to eliminate their debt and repair their credit. EHNS misled clients concerning the operation of the purported program. In particular, victim-clients were not told that their homes were, in fact, being sold to third parties and that ENHS would strip their homes of any available equity at the time of sale, which EHNS did. Instead, ENHS clients were told that they were only temporarily transferring their homes and would preserve their ownership rights.

Helton was recruited by White to represent ENHS participants at the real estate transactions it orchestrated. The victim-clients typically met Helton for the first time at the closings at which they sold their homes. Helton worked to placate individuals who questioned the program and to dissuade them from retaining independent legal advice. He received above-market legal fees for appearing at closings at which he did little more than guide victim-clients through the paperwork that sold their homes with EHNS receiving all of the profits from the sale. Helton further used the ENHS real estate closings to recruit prospective bankruptcy clients, informing them that bankruptcy would serve as a component of the bailout program. Helton subsequently filed more than a dozen bankruptcy petitions for victim-clients that omitted any reference to their recent EHNS property sales.

In addition to participating in ENHS's bailout program, Helton attempted to implement his own mortgage bailout program through Diamond Management of Chicago, Inc., a foreclosure avoidance company comparable to EHNS. Helton marketed Diamond's bailout program and his bankruptcy services as part of a "credit repair" system.

Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, announced the sentence today with Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Barry McLaughlin, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Office of Inspector General in Chicago; and Thomas P. Brady, Inspector-in-Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in Chicago. The U.S. Trustee Program, a Justice Department component that oversees administration of bankruptcy cases and private trustees, also assisted in the investigation.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joel Hammerman and Mark E. Schneider.

The case is part of a continuing effort to investigate and prosecute mortgage fraud in northern Illinois and nationwide under the umbrella of the interagency Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force, which was established to lead an aggressive, coordinated and proactive effort to investigate and prosecute financial crimes. For more information on the task force, visit: www.StopFraud.gov.

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