



*United States Attorney  
District of New Jersey*

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**NEW JERSEY MAN SENTENCED TO SEVEN YEARS IN PRISON  
FOR IMPERSONATING AN IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL  
IN ORDER TO DEFRAUD IMMIGRANTS**

TRENTON, N.J. – A serial “INS” agent impersonator who defrauded immigrants in New Jersey and Florida out of roughly \$200,000 over a four-year period was sentenced today to 84 months in prison, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Michael Ruiz, 46, of Newark, N.J., pleaded guilty on October 6, 2009, to a mail fraud scheme involving roughly two dozen immigrants in New Jersey. On May 10, 2010, Ruiz pleaded guilty to three additional counts of impersonating an immigration officer to obtain illegal payments in relation to a similar scheme he perpetrated in Florida after fleeing New Jersey as a fugitive in December 2007. Ruiz entered his guilty pleas before United States District Judge Freda L. Wolfson, who also imposed the sentence today in Trenton federal court.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

Ruiz, who has never been a federal employee, devised a scheme to defraud immigrants to the United States from March 2005 through June 2008 in New Jersey. He would approach those immigrants and introduce himself under a false name, tell them that he worked for “INS” or some other federal immigration authority, and offer a variety of immigration services for a fee, none of which he was in a position or ever intended to provide. The promised services included obtaining immigration and other documents, such as “green cards,” work permits, and social security cards for the immigrants. Ruiz also offered to arrange for the immigrants’ family members to enter the United States, and falsely represented that he could broker the purchase of discounted government-seized vehicles and homes.

Ruiz instructed certain immigrants to pay for these fake services by providing him directly with money orders. Other immigrants were instructed to pay by purchasing money orders made payable to “INS” and mailing these money orders to the immigration offices. With respect to these latter money orders, Ruiz stole them from the immigrants and altered them to make them appear payable to him so he could cash them.

For example, in March 2007 in New Jersey, Ruiz told an immigrant identified in court documents as A.A. that his name was “Michael Silva,” that he worked for “INS,” and that he could obtain INS documents, green cards, social security cards, and other documents. He also told A.A. that he could bring A.A.’s wife and child to the United States from Brazil in exchange

for approximately \$13,800. A.A. gave him the money, and Ruiz kept it.

Ruiz' three-year mail fraud scheme to defraud immigrants in New Jersey involved more than 20 victims who lost more than \$150,000.

Ruiz relocated to Jacksonville, Fla. in late 2007, where he misrepresented to immigrants that he was an immigration agent. For example, in November 2008, the defendant approached a victim at his business in Jacksonville and offered to assist the victim with an immigration matter. When the victim resisted the offer, Ruiz threatened to derail the victim's pending naturalization proceeding. The victim yielded and paid Ruiz \$495 by Moneygram. Ruiz then used a female relative and her child to pick up the Moneygram from Walmart, telling her that he could not pick up the money because he did not have Florida identification – which was not true.

The defendant also admitted that in December 2008, he demanded \$980 in cash and \$380 in a Moneygram from two more victims in Jacksonville in exchange for promised help with a visa application. In January 2009, in Orange Park, Florida, he demanded and received \$1,185 in a Moneygram from two additional victims in exchange for a promise to help them with their relative's immigration problems.

Ruiz victimized these and other Floridians for a total loss of roughly \$62,000.

In addition to the prison term, Judge Wolfson sentenced Ruiz to three years of supervised release and ordered him to pay restitution in an amount to be determined.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited special agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of Terence Opiola, Special Agent in Charge of the Hoboken, NJ office and Susan McCormick, Special Agent in Charge of the office overseeing Jacksonville, and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida, under the direction of U.S. Attorney A. Brian Albritton, for the investigation leading to the guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott B. McBride of the U.S. Attorney's Office Health Care and Government Fraud Unit.

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Defense counsel: Patrick N. McMahon, Federal Public Defender, Newark, N.J.

