



*United States Attorney
District of New Jersey*

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**NEW JERSEY MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO IMPERSONATING AN IMMIGRATION
OFFICIAL IN ORDER TO GET ILLEGAL PAYMENTS**

TRENTON, N.J. – A serial immigration agent impersonator pleaded guilty today for the second time in less than a year to federal fraud charges, admitting that, after stealing more than \$150,000 from over 20 immigrants in New Jersey over a three-year period, he moved his scheme to Florida and defrauded several more immigrants out of more than \$60,000, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Michael Ruiz, 46, of Newark, New Jersey, pleaded guilty to a three-count Indictment, originating out of the Middle District of Florida, charging him with impersonating an immigration officer in order to get illegal payments. Ruiz entered his guilty plea before United States District Judge Freda L. Wolfson.

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

Ruiz admitted that he relocated from New Jersey to Jacksonville, Florida in late 2007, where he pretended 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 didn't 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. He further admitted that 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.

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

On October 6, 2009, Ruiz pleaded guilty to a mail fraud charge related to a three-year mail fraud scheme to defraud immigrants 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 to provide. That case involved more than 20 victims and more than \$150,000 in loss to those victims.

Ruiz faces three years in prison on each of the counts to which he pleaded today, and 20 years in prison on the mail fraud charge to which he previously pleaded guilty. He also faces, for each count, a maximum fine of the greatest of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain or loss caused by his offense. Sentencing on all four counts is set for August 19, 2010 before Judge Wolfson in Trenton.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Wolfson will consult the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The Judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited special agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of 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 case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott B. McBride of the U.S. Attorney's Office Criminal Division.

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