

# NEWS

---

United States Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey  
970 Broad Street, Seventh Floor  
Newark, New Jersey 07102

---

---



---

---

***Paul J. Fishman, U.S. Attorney***

---

---

***More Information?*** Call the Assistant U.S. Attorney or other contact listed below to see if more information is available.

***News on the Internet:*** News Releases and related documents are posted at our website.  
***Go to:*** <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nj/press/index.html>

---

---

Assistant U.S. Attorney  
RICHARD E. CONSTABLE, III  
973-645-2719

moha0121.rel  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Jan 21, 2010

---

East Orange Construction Code Official Admits Accepting Corrupt  
Cash Payments in Return for Official Influence

---

(More)

---

---

Greg Reinert, PAO  
Public Affairs Office

856-757-5233  
973-645-2888

Breaking News (NJ) <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nj/press/index.html>

---

---

NEWARK – An East Orange construction code official pleaded guilty today to a federal charge of attempted extortion under color of official right, admitting he accepted thousands of dollars in corrupt cash payments from a cooperating witness, which were made through an East Orange Contractor, in return for exercising his future official assistance in favor of the cooperating witness’s project, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Billie F. Muhammad, 55, a.k.a. “Billie F. Thomas,” pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Susan D. Wigenton to a one-count Information that charges him with attempted extortion under color of official right. Judge Wigenton continued Muhammad release on a \$25,000 bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for April 26.

At his plea hearing, Muhammad admitted that between February 2007 and November 2007, he accepted between \$5,000 and \$10,000 in corrupt cash payments from a cooperating witness who was an East Orange store owner (“CW”). Muhammad admitted that in exchange for corrupt payments, he would exercise his future official assistance as a construction code official to assist the CW in obtaining certificates of occupancy for a purported store inspection. Muhammad admitted that the payments were made through a contractor named Rogelio D. Thompson, 52, of East Orange.

Thompson pleaded guilty before Judge Wigenton on Dec. 15, 2009, to a one-count Information that charged him with conspiracy to commit extortion under color of official right. Judge Wigenton released Thompson on a \$25,000 bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for March.

Muhammad and Thompson’s guilty pleas stem from an undercover FBI investigation into political corruption in East Orange. As part of the investigation both Thomas and Thompson were recorded, on video, extorting \$4,000 from the store owner on November 9, 2007.

The charge of attempted extortion under color of official right carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Wigenton will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which recommend sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offenses, the defendant’s criminal history, if any, and other factors, including acceptance of responsibility. The judge, however, has discretion and is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. A defendant who is given custodial terms must serve nearly all of that time.

Fishman credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Kevin B. Cruise, for the investigation leading to today's guilty plea.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard E. Constable, III of the U.S. Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

– end –

Defense Counsel: Hassan Ibn Abdellah, Esq. Elizabeth