

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS
EASTERN DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

KARI KUZELKA

No. 19 CR 780-3

Judge Sara L. Ellis

PLEA AGREEMENT

1. This Plea Agreement between the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, JOHN R. LAUSCH, JR., and defendant KARI KUZELKA, and her attorney, JOHN DE LEON, is made pursuant to Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure and is governed in part by Rule 11(c)(1)(A), as more fully set forth below. The parties to this Agreement have agreed upon the following:

Charges in This Case

2. The indictment in this case charges defendant with conspiracy to commit alien harboring for purposes of commercial advantage, in violation of Title 8, United States Code, Sections 1324(a)(1)(A)(v)(I) and 1324(a)(1)(B)(i) (Count 1); alien harboring for purposes of commercial advantage, in violation of Title 8, United States Code, Sections 1324(a)(1)(A)(iii), (a)(1)(A)(v)(II) and (a)(1)(B)(i) (Counts 2-11); and engaging in the pattern and practice of hiring unauthorized aliens, in violation of Title 8, United States Code, Sections 1324a(a)(1)(A), 1324a(a)(2) and 1324a(f)(1) (Count 12).

3. Defendant has read the charges against her contained in the indictment, and those charges have been fully explained to her by her attorney.

4. Defendant fully understands the nature and elements of the crimes with which she has been charged.

Charge to Which Defendant Is Pleading Guilty

5. By this Plea Agreement, defendant agrees to enter a voluntary plea of guilty to the following count of the indictment: Count Twelve, which charges defendant with engaging in a pattern and practice of hiring unauthorized aliens, in violation of Title 8, United States Code, Sections 1324a(a)(1)(A), 1324a(a)(2) and 1324a(f)(1).

Factual Basis

6. Defendant will plead guilty because she is in fact guilty of the charge contained in Count Twelve of the indictment. In pleading guilty, defendant admits the following facts and that those facts establish her guilt beyond a reasonable doubt and constitute relevant conduct pursuant to Guideline § 1B1.3:

From in or around June 2017, and continuing until in or around August 29, 2019, in Streamwood, in the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, KARI KUZELKA, Kenneth Kuzelka, Dora Kuzelka, and Keith Kuzelka, did knowingly and intentionally engage in a pattern or practice of hiring for employment in the United States, and continuing to employ in the United States, aliens, knowing that the aliens were unauthorized aliens with respect to such employment.

Specifically, KARI KUZELKA, along with her family members Kenneth Kuzelka, Dora Kuzelka, and Keith Kuzelka, owned KSO Metalfab, Incorporated (“KSO”), a metal fabrication company located in Streamwood, Illinois, that provided sheet metal fabrication and machining for metallic-based products. At relevant times, KARI KUZELKA was the Secretary of KSO and one of its managing owners.

On or about April 11, 2017, the United States Department of Homeland Security Investigations (“HSI”) issued a Notice of Inspection to Kenneth Kuzelka, another of KSO’s managing owners. At the time of the Notice, KSO’s workforce was comprised of approximately 67 employees. Based on HSI’s investigation, approximately 36 of the 67 employees were aliens as defined by Section 1324a, meaning that they were without legal status or authorization to work in the United States, and HSI provided to Kenneth Kuzelka, Dora Kuzelka, and KSO’s Human Resources Manager, a list identifying the 36 employees. The 36 employees were long-term KSO employees who were personally known by KARI KUZELKA, Kenneth Kuzelka, Dora Kuzelka, and Keith Kuzelka.

In or around May 2017, Kenneth Kuzelka instructed Keith Kuzelka to contact a staffing company to assist in rehiring the undocumented workers. Sergio Badani, who was at the time the Vice President of Operations at Staffing Company A, later met and communicated with both Keith Kuzelka and Kenneth Kuzelka about assisting KSO with rehiring undocumented employees. KSO ultimately contracted with Staffing Company A to obtain the labor of the undocumented workers, and

Staffing Company A eventually sent approximately 20 of the illegal alien employees back to KSO as temporary employees, for the purposes of private financial gain and for the commercial advantage of both KSO and Staffing Company A.

KARI KUZELKA and Kenneth Kuzelka were the managers that supervised, disciplined, and rewarded the former KSO workers subsequently employed by Staffing Company A and sent back to KSO as temporary employees, knowing that the workers were undocumented aliens. After Keith Kuzelka was terminated from KSO in or around September 2018, KARI KUZELKA, Kenneth Kuzelka, and Sergio Badani met and discussed the illegal alien employees employed by Staffing Company A and staffed at KSO. During the holiday season in 2018, KARI KUZELKA paid bonuses from KSO to the illegal alien employees employed by Staffing Company A, with assistance from Badani.

On or about February 5, 2019, a law enforcement agent spoke by phone with KARI KUZELKA regarding the employment of illegal aliens at KSO. In sum and substance, the law enforcement agent identified himself and later asked whether any of the terminated KSO employees had returned. Despite knowing that a number of the terminated KSO employees had been rehired and again were working at KSO, through Staffing Company A, KARI KUZELKA falsely responded to the agent, “Nope, I don’t think they want . . . to take any chances themselves so,” and “Not as far as I know.” KARI KUZELKA also said, in sum and substance, that she now verified all

employees' legal authorization to work in the United States before they started at KSO.

Also, on or about June 20, 2019, KARI KUZELKA spoke with one of the undocumented KSO employees who had been terminated and rehired and another KSO employee. Among other things, KARI KUZELKA discussed law enforcement surveillance of KSO and stops of KSO employees, and described, in sum and substance, her February 2019 call with the law enforcement agent. KARI KUZELKA noted that she had said "no" when the agent had asked her if "any of the employees that were here before try to come back," but that KARI KUZELKA had not liked "the way he asked me that though." When the undocumented KSO employee commented, "Sounds like they [law enforcement] figured something out," KARI KUZELKA responded, "But there's nowhere for them to go. Might have to change their hours." KARI KUZELKA also later commented that one of the undocumented KSO workers, who had been terminated and rehired through Staffing Company A, should not have told law enforcement that he worked at KSO, as "that's not good because we already got pinched so it's in the system, you know what I mean."

Knowing the illegal nature of the rehiring and continued employment of the undocumented workers, KARI KUZELKA continued to own, manage, and work at KSO, and facilitate KSO's continued employment of undocumented employees identified by the government, including APS, APZ, DGM, FSR, GDS, JZS, MG, MYC, OJG, RAM, VTJ, DHV, MC, EMM, JC, AR (a/k/a FL), YRC, and LV (a/k/a PV). KARI

KUZELKA knew that these employees were in the United States illegally and remained and were employed in the United States in violation of the law.

Maximum Statutory Penalties

7. Defendant understands that the charge to which she is pleading guilty carries the following statutory penalties:

a. A maximum sentence of 6 months' imprisonment. This offense also carries a maximum fine of \$3,000. Defendant further understands that the judge also may impose a term of supervised release of not more than one year.

b. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 3013, defendant will be assessed \$10 on the charge to which she has pled guilty, in addition to any other penalty imposed.

Sentencing Guidelines Calculations

8. Defendant understands that in determining a sentence, the Court is obligated to calculate the applicable Sentencing Guidelines range, and to consider that range, possible departures under the Sentencing Guidelines, and other sentencing factors under 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a), which include: (i) the nature and circumstances of the offense and the history and characteristics of the defendant; (ii) the need for the sentence imposed to reflect the seriousness of the offense, promote respect for the law, and provide just punishment for the offense, afford adequate deterrence to criminal conduct, protect the public from further crimes of the defendant, and provide the defendant with needed educational or vocational training,

medical care, or other correctional treatment in the most effective manner; (iii) the kinds of sentences available; (iv) the need to avoid unwarranted sentence disparities among defendants with similar records who have been found guilty of similar conduct; and (v) the need to provide restitution to any victim of the offense.

9. For purposes of calculating the Sentencing Guidelines, the parties agree on the following points:

a. The Sentencing Guidelines to be considered in this case are those in effect at the time of sentencing. The following statements regarding the calculation of the Sentencing Guidelines are based on the Guidelines Manual currently in effect, namely the November 2021 Guidelines Manual. However, the Sentencing Guidelines do not apply to the count of conviction, as a Class B misdemeanor, pursuant to Guideline § 1B1.9. Therefore, based on the facts now known to the government, the court may impose any sentence authorized by statute for the count of conviction.

10. Both parties expressly acknowledge that this Agreement is not governed by Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(B), and that errors in applying or interpreting any of the sentencing guidelines may be corrected by either party prior to sentencing. The parties may correct these errors either by stipulation or by a statement to the Probation Office or the Court, setting forth the disagreement regarding the applicable provisions of the guidelines. The validity of this Agreement will not be affected by such corrections, and defendant shall not have a right to withdraw her plea, nor the government the right to vacate this Agreement, on the basis of such corrections.

Agreements Relating to Sentencing

11. Each party is free to recommend whatever sentence it deems appropriate.

12. It is understood by the parties that the sentencing judge is neither a party to nor bound by this Agreement and may impose a sentence up to the maximum penalties as set forth above. Defendant further acknowledges that if the Court does not accept the sentencing recommendation of the parties, defendant will have no right to withdraw her guilty plea.

13. Defendant agrees to pay the special assessment of \$10 at the time of sentencing with a cashier's check or money order payable to the Clerk of the U.S. District Court.

14. After sentence has been imposed on the count to which defendant pleads guilty as agreed herein, the government will move to dismiss the remaining counts of the indictment as to defendant.

Forfeiture

15. Defendant understands that by pleading guilty, she will subject to forfeiture to the United States all right, title, and interest that she has in any property constituting or derived from proceeds obtained, directly or indirectly, as a result of the offense.

16. Defendant acknowledges that as part of her sentence, the Court will decide, by a preponderance of the evidence, whether the government has established

the requisite nexus between the offense and any specific property alleged to be subject to forfeiture and the amount of a personal money judgment she must pay.

Acknowledgments and Waivers Regarding Plea of Guilty

Nature of Agreement

17. This Agreement is entirely voluntary and represents the entire agreement between the United States Attorney and defendant regarding defendant's criminal liability in case 19 CR 780-3.

18. This Agreement concerns criminal liability only. Except as expressly set forth in this Agreement, nothing herein shall constitute a limitation, waiver, or release by the United States or any of its agencies of any administrative or judicial civil claim, demand, or cause of action it may have against defendant or any other person or entity. The obligations of this Agreement are limited to the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois and cannot bind any other federal, state, or local prosecuting, administrative, or regulatory authorities, except as expressly set forth in this Agreement.

Waiver of Rights

19. Defendant understands that by pleading guilty she surrenders certain rights, including the following:

a. **Trial rights.** Defendant has the right to persist in a plea of not guilty to the charges against her, and if she does, she would have the right to a public and speedy trial.

i. The trial could be either a jury trial or a trial by the judge sitting without a jury. However, in order that the trial be conducted by the judge sitting without a jury, defendant, the government, and the judge all must agree that the trial be conducted by the judge without a jury.

ii. If the trial is a jury trial, the jury would be composed of twelve citizens from the district, selected at random. Defendant and her attorney would participate in choosing the jury by requesting that the Court remove prospective jurors for cause where actual bias or other disqualification is shown, or by removing prospective jurors without cause by exercising peremptory challenges.

iii. If the trial is a jury trial, the jury would be instructed that defendant is presumed innocent, that the government has the burden of proving defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and that the jury could not convict her unless, after hearing all the evidence, it was persuaded of her guilt beyond a reasonable doubt and that it was to consider each count of the indictment separately. The jury would have to agree unanimously as to each count before it could return a verdict of guilty or not guilty as to that count.

iv. If the trial is held by the judge without a jury, the judge would find the facts and determine, after hearing all the evidence, and considering each count separately, whether or not the judge was persuaded that the government had established defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

v. At a trial, whether by a jury or a judge, the government would be required to present its witnesses and other evidence against defendant. Defendant would be able to confront those government witnesses and her attorney would be able to cross-examine them.

vi. At a trial, defendant could present witnesses and other evidence in her own behalf. If the witnesses for defendant would not appear voluntarily, she could require their attendance through the subpoena power of the Court. A defendant is not required to present any evidence.

vii. At a trial, defendant would have a privilege against self-incrimination so that she could decline to testify, and no inference of guilt could be drawn from her refusal to testify. If defendant desired to do so, she could testify in her own behalf.

viii. With respect to forfeiture, defendant understands that if the case were tried before a jury, she would have a right to retain the jury to determine whether the government had established the requisite nexus between defendant's offense and any specific property alleged to be subject to forfeiture.

b. **Waiver of appellate and collateral rights.** Defendant further understands she is waiving all appellate issues that might have been available if she had exercised her right to trial. Defendant is aware that Title 28, United States Code, Section 1291, and Title 18, United States Code, Section 3742, afford a defendant the right to appeal her conviction and the sentence imposed. Acknowledging this,

defendant knowingly waives the right to appeal her conviction, any pre-trial rulings by the Court, and any part of the sentence (or the manner in which that sentence was determined), including any term of imprisonment and fine within the maximums provided by law, and including any order of forfeiture, in exchange for the concessions made by the United States in this Agreement. In addition, defendant also waives her right to challenge her conviction and sentence, and the manner in which the sentence was determined, in any collateral attack or future challenge, including but not limited to a motion brought under Title 28, United States Code, Section 2255. The waiver in this paragraph does not apply to a claim of involuntariness or ineffective assistance of counsel, nor does it prohibit defendant from seeking a reduction of sentence based directly on a change in the law that is applicable to defendant and that, prior to the filing of defendant's request for relief, has been expressly made retroactive by an Act of Congress, the Supreme Court, or the United States Sentencing Commission.

20. Defendant understands that by pleading guilty she is waiving all the rights set forth in the prior paragraphs. Defendant's attorney has explained those rights to her, and the consequences of her waiver of those rights.

Presentence Investigation Report/Post-Sentence Supervision

21. Defendant understands that the United States Attorney's Office in its submission to the Probation Office as part of the Pre-Sentence Report and at sentencing shall fully apprise the District Court and the Probation Office of the nature, scope, and extent of defendant's conduct regarding the charges against her,

and related matters. The government will make known all matters in aggravation and mitigation relevant to sentencing.

22. Defendant agrees to truthfully and completely execute a Financial Statement (with supporting documentation) prior to sentencing, to be provided to and shared among the Court, the Probation Office, and the United States Attorney's Office regarding all details of her financial circumstances, including her recent income tax returns as specified by the probation officer. Defendant understands that providing false or incomplete information, or refusing to provide this information, may be used as a basis for denial of a reduction for acceptance of responsibility pursuant to Guideline § 3E1.1 and enhancement of her sentence for obstruction of justice under Guideline § 3C1.1, and may be prosecuted as a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1001 or as a contempt of the Court.

23. For the purpose of monitoring defendant's compliance with her obligations to pay a fine during any term of supervised release or probation to which defendant is sentenced, defendant further consents to the disclosure by the IRS to the Probation Office and the United States Attorney's Office of defendant's individual income tax returns (together with extensions, correspondence, and other tax information) filed subsequent to defendant's sentencing, to and including the final year of any period of supervised release or probation to which defendant is sentenced. Defendant also agrees that a certified copy of this Agreement shall be sufficient

evidence of defendant's request to the IRS to disclose the returns and return information, as provided for in Title 26, United States Code, Section 6103(b).

Other Terms

24. Defendant agrees to cooperate with the United States Attorney's Office in collecting any unpaid fine for which defendant is liable, including providing financial statements and supporting records as requested by the United States Attorney's Office.

25. Defendant recognizes that pleading guilty may have consequences with respect to her immigration status if she is not a citizen of the United States. Under federal law, a broad range of crimes are removable offenses, including the offense to which defendant is pleading guilty. Removal and other immigration consequences are the subject of a separate proceeding, however, and defendant understands that no one, including her attorney or the Court, can predict to a certainty the effect of her conviction on her immigration status. Defendant nevertheless affirms that she wants to plead guilty regardless of any immigration consequences that her guilty plea may entail, even if the consequence is her automatic removal from the United States.

Conclusion

26. Defendant understands that this Agreement will be filed with the Court, will become a matter of public record, and may be disclosed to any person.

27. Defendant understands that her compliance with each part of this Agreement extends throughout the period of her sentence, and failure to abide by any

term of the Agreement is a violation of the Agreement. Defendant further understands that in the event she violates this Agreement, the government, at its option, may move to vacate the Agreement, rendering it null and void, and thereafter prosecute defendant not subject to any of the limits set forth in this Agreement, or may move to resentence defendant or require defendant's specific performance of this Agreement. Defendant understands and agrees that in the event that the Court permits defendant to withdraw from this Agreement, or defendant breaches any of its terms and the government elects to void the Agreement and prosecute defendant, any prosecutions that are not time-barred by the applicable statute of limitations on the date of the signing of this Agreement may be commenced against defendant in accordance with this paragraph, notwithstanding the expiration of the statute of limitations between the signing of this Agreement and the commencement of such prosecutions.

28. Should the judge refuse to accept defendant's plea of guilty, this Agreement shall become null and void and neither party will be bound to it.

29. Defendant and her attorney acknowledge that no threats, promises, or representations have been made, nor agreements reached, other than those set forth in this Agreement, to cause defendant to plead guilty.

30. Defendant acknowledges that she has read this Agreement and carefully reviewed each provision with her attorney. Defendant further acknowledges that she

understands and voluntarily accepts each and every term and condition of this Agreement.

AGREED THIS DATE: 5/3/2022

MATTHEW
MADDEN


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Date: 2022.05.04 16:40:49
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JOHN R. LAUSCH, JR.
United States Attorney

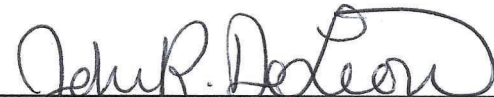
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ASHLEY A. CHUNG
Assistant U.S. Attorney



KARI KUZELKA
Defendant



JOHN DE LEON
Attorney for Defendant