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Document and Benefit Fraud

03/02/2018

### **Texas man sentenced to 3 years in prison for defrauding immigrants by claiming he could provide legal status for money**

Defendant claimed to work for immigration agency and scammed victims out of more than \$400,000

SEATTLE – A 50-year old Texas man was sentenced Friday in U.S. District Court to three years in prison and three years of supervised release for his scheme to defraud individuals seeking immigration benefits, the result of an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR).

Alejandro Gurany-Navarro, of El Paso, collected thousands of dollars from foreign nationals across the U.S. after telling them he worked for a government immigration office and could provide the immigrants with legal status for a fee. In fact, Gurany-Navarro, was never employed by a federal immigration agency, and he was ordered to pay more than 25 victims in Washington and Ohio \$140,550 in restitution.

According to records in the case, between at least December 2011 and March 2015, Gurany-Navarro pretended to be an employee of the United States and told aliens he could get them legal status in the U.S. in exchange for money. He traveled to SeaTac, Wash. and met with the aliens at an airport, where he took personal identifying information, including photographs and fingerprints from the immigrants seeking green cards or citizenship. Some of the immigrants paid Gurany-Navarro thousands of dollars with the expectation he would provide them legal status. When no legal status was provided, the aliens were afraid to complain about Gurany, since he had all their personal information and they believed he could get them deported.

"This defendant preyed on vulnerable people, exploiting their fear of deportation to line his pockets with their hard-earned wages," said U.S. Attorney Annette Hayes, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Washington. "He stole not only their money, but their American dream of education and a better life for themselves and their children."

ICE OPR received information from a detainee in 2013 that Gurany-Navarro was posing as an immigration official, and began a financial fraud investigation that revealed the scheme. The investigation revealed \$412,775 had been paid in cash or funneled into Gurany-Navarro's bank accounts from nine states – including Wash. Knowing of the cash payments, and the approximate dollar figures Gurany-Navarro demanded, investigators believe the number of victims is likely far more than the 25 they have been able to identify.

"ICE remains steadfast in investigating these types of impersonation fraud schemes where individuals are defrauded and harmed through brazen greed and dishonesty," said Shawn Fallah, Resident Agent in Charge of ICE OPR. "Fraudsters like the defendant increase the public's mistrust of law enforcement and degrade the integrity of our immigration system and process."

Judge Robert S. Lasnik accepted the defendant's claim that Mexican cartels threatened him and his family, demanding that he pay them money, but added that such a claim does not excuse his conduct. "It was a very insidious and awful crime that Mr. Gurany-Navarro committed. You cannot justify it by saying 'I need to protect my family' and then preying on other families."

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Nicholas Manheim.

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**AILA Doc. No. 18032032. (Posted 3/20/18)**<https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/texas-man-sentenced-3-years-prison-defrauding-immigrants-claiming-he-could-provide>

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