



Department of Investigation

Press Release

Release #2-99

RIKERS PRISONER GETS ADDITIONAL 2 - 4 YEARS' JAIL FOR SCAMMING FAMILIES OF ILLEGAL ALIEN INMATES

THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 1999 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced that THOMAS CASTRO, an inmate on Rikers Island, was sentenced to 2 - 4 years in prison for defrauding the families of two illegal alien inmates over the last two years by falsely representing that, with the help of his wife, VIRGINIA CRICHLOW, he could have an inmate's deportation status lifted for a fee ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

CASTRO, 32, who is presently serving a one-year term at the Rikers Island Correctional Institution for Men on an unrelated matter, appeared yesterday afternoon before Bronx Criminal Court Judge Laura Safer Espinoza for sentencing. He had previously pleaded guilty at arraignment on December 22, 1998, to the felony crime of Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree. His wife, VIRGINIA CRICHLOW, 46, of 253 Cumberland Street in Brooklyn, had also pleaded guilty to the same charge on December 22, and is scheduled for sentencing on February 2, 1999.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, in 1996, DOI received information from an inmate that a person named VIRGINIA CRICHLOW, who purportedly worked on Rikers Island, was removing Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) "detainers" from Department of Correction (DOC) computers and inmate files for a fee. An inmate who has a detainer removed, Mr. Kuriansky explained, would be eligible to be released from DOC custody without being transferred to INS custody upon the final disposition of his underlying criminal matter. A review of personnel records quickly determined that DOC employed no individual by the name of VIRGINIA CRICHLOW. However, DOI learned that a woman named VIRGINIA CRICHLOW was visiting her husband, THOMAS CASTRO, who was then incarcerated on Rikers Island.

Because of the nature of the allegation, DOI notified and then worked jointly with the Department of Justice's Office of the Inspector General, which oversees the INS, on the investigation.

According to the Felony Complaint filed by Bronx District Attorney Robert T. Johnson, between January 1996 and April 1998, CASTRO, acting in concert with CRICHLOW, engaged in an ongoing scheme in which they falsely represented to various inmates' families that, for a fee, they could arrange to lift the inmates' INS detainers and thereby prevent their deportation by removing paperwork from DOC files and by accessing and deleting DOC computer records. For example:

1) On October 5, 1996, CASTRO arranged for CRICHLOW to meet with an inmate's wife and daughter at their Bronx apartment and represent that she could have the inmate's INS detainer lifted in exchange for a fee of \$2,000 in cash -- with half to be paid before any action was taken and the balance to be paid later. As part of their scheme, CASTRO arranged for CRICHLOW to give the inmate's wife a fraudulent document written on

bogus "New York Criminal Justice Agency" letterhead, which CRICHLOW claimed had been pulled from the inmate's file to prevent him from being deported. On that same day, CRICHLOW was given a down payment of \$847 by the inmate's wife and, two weeks later, received \$153 in cash from his daughter.

2) In November 1997, CASTRO arranged for CRICHLOW to meet with another inmate's girlfriend and represent that in exchange for \$1,200 in cash she could have the inmate's INS detainer lifted. Between December 1997 and April 1998, CASTRO arranged for CRICHLOW to accept installment payments totaling \$1,050 from the girlfriend -- including \$200 in cash that CASTRO had instructed the inmate's girlfriend to wire via Western Union to CRICHLOW's Brooklyn home.

Commissioner Kuriansky noted that the investigation determined that the defendants CASTRO and CRICHLOW, in fact, had no access to INS or DOC files or computers, and that the inmates are still subject to deportation.

The investigation was conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner Michael Caruso, Inspector General for the Department of Correction (DOC), and Robert Franco, Special Agent for the Department of Justice's Office of Inspector General. Also assisting on the investigation were DOC Deputy Inspector General Louis Marano, DOC Captain George Okada, Correction Officer Investigator Magdalia Figueroa.

The Office of Bronx District Attorney Robert T. Johnson prosecuted the case. Assistant District Attorney Stephan Zander handled the matter.