



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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DOI Arrests Staten Island Landlord In Bribery "Sting" -Paid HPD Inspector To Ignore Illegal Conversion- Article Title

FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2000 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of JOSEPH NATIVO, a Staten Island property owner, for paying a \$200 bribe to an undercover City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) inspector. The payoff allegedly was in return for not reporting the illegal conversion of a first-floor storefront into single-room occupancy units in violation of the City housing and building code.

Commissioner Kuriansky said, "This arrest is part of DOI's ongoing effort to deter municipal corruption and should serve as fair warning to any citizen who might even be tempted to bribe a City worker. In this case, the HPD inspector noted violations during a routine inspection, rebuffed the landlord's improper approach, and immediately reported the incident to DOI. His actions are to be commended. He represents the overwhelming majority of good, honest, and decent City employees."

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, DOI began an investigation after an HPD code enforcement inspector reported that on February 29th, during a heat and hot water inspection conducted in response to a complaint by a tenant living at 959 Van Duzer Street -- a 3-story multiple dwelling in Grymes Hill on Staten Island -- he discovered that the first-floor storefront had been illegally converted into single-room occupancy space with 4 bedroom units and a common kitchen and bathroom. The inspector said that the property owner had approached him during the inspection, but he refused to speak with him.

Commissioner Kuriansky explained that the conversion violated the building's certificate of occupancy, which restricted the space -- formerly a dentist's office -- to commercial use only, as well as the HPD multiple dwelling law, which requires a property owner to obtain a permit from the Department of Buildings before making property alterations.

Thereafter, on March 8, DOI sent an HPD undercover inspector, wearing a concealed recording device, to conduct another inspection of the Van Duzer Street property. After the undercover had inspected the first floor, NATIVO, the property owner, allegedly approached him, handed him \$200 in cash, and asked him not to record the violations.

NATIVO, 38, of 251 Shirley Avenue, Staten Island, was charged with Bribery in the Third Degree, a Class D felony, and Rewarding Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, a Class E felony. If

convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to HPD Commissioner Richard T. Roberts and his staff for their assistance and cooperation in the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by Brian D. Foley, DOI's Inspector General for HPD, and members of his staff, including Special Investigator David Jordan.

The Office of the Richmond County District Attorney William L. Murphy is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney Rick Pasacreta is assigned to handle the matter.