

JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, November 30, 2017

Former Federal Agent Pleads Guilty to Accepting Bribes to Dismiss Indictment Against Colombian Narcotics Kingpin

A former U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HSI) Special Agent pleaded guilty today to accepting bribes in exchange for securing the dismissal of a drug trafficking indictment filed against a Colombian cocaine trafficker, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General John P. Cronan of the Justice Department's Criminal Division.

According to admissions in his plea agreement, Christopher V. Ciccione II, 52, of Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, accepted cash and other things of value and used his official position to cause a drug trafficking indictment against Colombian national Jose Bayron Piedrahita Ceballos to be dismissed and to obtain official authorization for Piedrahita and his family to enter the United States. Piedrahita and Colombian national Juan Carlos Velasco Cano, 49, gave Ciccione approximately \$20,000 in cash, as well as dinner, drinks and prostitution during an extended hotel stay in Bogota, Colombia, in exchange for official acts that resulted in the dismissal of the indictment against Piedrahita. Velasco, who previously pleaded guilty, served as the intermediary between Ciccione and Piedrahita.

Ciccione admitted that in furtherance of this scheme to obstruct justice, he misled the U.S. Attorney's Office and HSI management and altered law enforcement records to represent to decision makers that Piedrahita was a "former" suspect of a closed investigation, rather than a "current" subject, who was "never positively identified" and that his case should be dismissed—all while maintaining contact with Piedrahita. Ciccione also falsified the concurrence of several other federal agents and attempted to parole Piedrahita into the United States.

Ciccione will be sentenced on Feb. 9, 2018, before U.S. District Judge Robert N. Scola Jr. of the Southern District of Florida. Piedrahita is currently incarcerated in the Republic of Colombia.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated Piedrahita as a Specially Designated Narcotics Trafficker pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act on May 3, 2016.

ICE's Office of Professional Responsibility, Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General and the FBI investigated the case. The Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs, the Office of the Judicial Attaché in Colombia and the Drug Enforcement Administration provided valuable assistance to the investigation. The Colombian Attorney General's Office also provided invaluable support. Trial Attorneys Luke Cass and Jennifer A. Clarke of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section are prosecuting the case.

Component(s):

Criminal Division

Press Release Number:

17-1350

Updated November 30, 2017