

JUSTICE NEWS

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Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent Pleads Guilty to Wire Fraud Scheme

A former U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HSI) Special Agent pleaded guilty today to devising a wire fraud scheme that defrauded SunTrust Mortgage and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation ("Freddie Mac") of over \$40,000, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General John P. Cronan of the Justice Department's Criminal Division.

Shauna Kay N. Sutherland, 37, of Corpus Christi, Texas, pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud before U.S. District Judge Robert N. Scola Jr. of the Southern District of Florida.

According to admissions in the plea agreement, Sutherland defrauded SunTrust Mortgage and Freddie Mac into allowing a short sale of her property in Gainesville, Georgia, to a family friend who acted as a straw purchaser. Sutherland falsely represented that there were no hidden agreements and requested forgiveness of over \$40,000 owed on the mortgage due to her purported financial hardship. Based on those material representations, SunTrust Mortgage and Freddie Mac accepted the short sale offer, with the family friend "purchasing" the property for approximately \$34,000, in exchange for SunTrust Mortgage and Freddie Mac releasing Sutherland from her outstanding debt. Freddie Mac, which had by then purchased the mortgage, calculated a total loss of more than \$42,000 as a result of this transaction.

In reality, however, Sutherland admitted that pursuant to the secret agreement with her family friend, Sutherland herself provided the purchase money for the short sale using funds wired to her by her mother. Sutherland remained the de facto owner of the property, collected rent from tenants and paid for maintenance. Sutherland adopted the straw purchaser's identity to communicate by email about the property and signed that person's signature on relevant documents. She also used the straw purchaser's bank account as a conduit for financial transactions related to the property. Sutherland, through the straw purchaser, later sold the property in 2013 and used the proceeds to buy another property in Florida.

Sutherland will be sentenced on June 29 before U.S. District Judge Robert N. Scola Jr. of the Southern District of Florida.

ICE's Office of Professional Responsibility, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General and the FBI investigated the case with assistance provided by U.S. Customs and Border Protection Office of Professional Responsibility. Trial Attorneys Luke Cass and Simon J. Cataldo of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section are prosecuting the case.

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