

Three Former Department of Homeland Security Employees Sentenced in Scheme to Defraud the United States

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Columbia

Convicted in Theft of Proprietary Software and Sensitive Government Databases

WASHINGTON – Three former federal employees were sentenced today for their roles in a conspiracy to steal proprietary software and sensitive law-enforcement databases from the U.S. government for use in a commercial venture.

The sentencings were announced today by U.S. Attorney Matthew M. Graves; Acting Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS-OIG); and Inspector General Tammy Hull of the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (USPS OIG).

Murali Y. Venkata, 58, of Aldie, Va., is a former Acting Branch Chief of the Information Technology Division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS-OIG). Venkata was convicted on Apr. 11, 2023, for conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government, theft of government property, wire fraud, and obstruction. Venkata was sentenced to four months in prison today by U.S. District Judge Randolph D. Moss, who also ordered Venkata to serve two years of supervised release with eight months of home incarceration, and to serve 60 hours of community service.

Charles K. Edwards, 63, of Sandy Spring, Md, was the Acting Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS-OIG). In January 2022, Edwards pleaded guilty to theft of government property, and conspiracy to commit theft of government property and to defraud the United States. Edwards was sentenced by Judge Moss today to 18 months in prison and two years of supervised release.

Sonal Patel, 49, of Sterling, Va., had been employed in DHS-OIG's information technology department. Patel was sentenced by Judge Moss today to two years probation with one year of home

incarceration, and a fine of \$40,000. In April 2019, Patel pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit theft of government property.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Venkata, Edwards, and Patel were all previously employed at the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (USPS OIG). The trio conspired to steal proprietary U.S. software and databases containing sensitive law-enforcement information and the personally identifying information (PII) of over 200,000 federal employees from DHS-OIG and USPS OIG. They planned to use the stolen software and databases to create a commercial software product to be offered for sale to government agencies. As part of the scheme, the co-conspirators disclosed the stolen software and databases containing PII to software developers located in India. After Venkata learned of the investigation, he deleted incriminating text messages and other communications in an effort to obstruct the investigation.

DHS-OIG and USPS OIG investigated the case.

The case was prosecuted by Trial Attorney Celia Choy of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section (PIN) and Assistant U.S. Attorney Christine Macey for the District of Columbia. Significant assistance was provided by former PIN Senior Litigation Counsel Victor Salgado, former Assistant U.S. Attorney David Kent, and Paralegal Specialist Michon Tart.