



## U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney's Office  
Middle District of Pennsylvania*

*William J. Nealon Federal Building  
Suite 311  
235 N. Washington Avenue  
P.O. Box 309  
Scranton, PA 18503-0309  
(570) 348-2800  
FAX (570) 348-2037/348-2830*

*Ronald Reagan Federal Building  
Suite 220  
228 Walnut Street  
P.O. Box 11754  
Harrisburg, PA 17108-1754  
(717) 221-4482  
FAX (717) 221-4493/221-2246*

*Herman T. Schneebeli Federal Building  
Suite 316  
240 West Third Street  
Williamsport, PA 17701-6465  
(570) 326-1935  
FAX (570) 326-7916*

*Please respond to: Harrisburg*

August 11, 2009

### **NEWS RELEASE**

#### **FEDERAL OFFICIALS ANNOUNCE THE FILING OF A CRIMINAL INFORMATION AND PLEA AGREEMENT INVOLVING CORRUPT RECEIPT OF A REWARD FOR OFFICIAL ACTION IN CONNECTION WITH A CONTRACT AWARDED IN THE PITTSTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Dennis C. Pfannenschmidt, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania; Janice Fedaryck, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation; and Don Fort, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division, jointly announced today that a criminal information and plea agreement have been filed against Joseph Oliveri, age 52 of Hughesstown, Pennsylvania. The criminal information charges Oliveri with corrupt receipt of a reward for official action concerning a program receiving federal funds.

According to the charge filed today in federal court, Oliveri accepted a cash reward of \$1,500 from a contractor in connection with support Oliveri provided for a contract awarded to the contractor by the Pittston Area School District Board of Education.

Oliveri faces a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000.

According to U.S. Attorney Pfannenschmidt, Oliveri is the tenth person charged with criminal conduct since late January of this year in an on-going public corruption investigation targeting public corruption in Luzerne County. In January 2009, Mark Ciavarella and Michael Conahan, the former President Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County, were charged with engaging in honest services fraud and tax conspiracy. William Sharkey, the former Court Administrator of Luzerne County, has pleaded guilty to embezzlement charges and is awaiting sentencing. Sandra Brulo, the former Deputy Director of Forensic Programs for the Luzerne County Probation Office, has pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice and is awaiting sentencing.

In addition, On April 20, 2009, Brian Dunn, age 45, a member

of the school board for the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, was charged in a criminal complaint with allegedly accepting cash in connection with the hiring of teachers and the awarding of contracts by the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. On May 18, James Height, age 53, of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, who resigned recently as President of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District Board of Education, was charged in a criminal information with allegedly accepting \$2,000 in cash in connection with support he provided to a contractor in connection with an attempt by the contractor to obtain a contract with the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. On May 20, 2009 Dr. Ross Scarantino, age 63, of Duryea, who recently tendered his resignation as Pittston Area School District Superintendent, was charged in a criminal information with allegedly accepting \$5,000 in cash in connection with support he provided to a contractor in connection with the contractor obtaining a contract with the Pittston Area School District. Scarantino and Height have both pleaded guilty to these charges and agreed to cooperate in the on-going investigation.

On June 9, 2009, Attorney Robert Powell was charged in a two-count information with misprision of a felony and being an accessory after the fact. Powell has pleaded guilty to the charges and is awaiting sentencing. On August 4, 2009, Karen Holly, age 51, of West Pittston, Pennsylvania, was charged in an information with theft of more than \$5,000 from the Wyoming Valley Sanitation Authority, an agency receiving federal funds

Also as a result of the investigation, former Luzerne County Prothonotary Jill Moran resigned from her office and voluntarily agreed to the entry of a court order directing her to cooperate with the on-going federal public corruption probe looking into allegations of misconduct at the Luzerne County Courthouse.

On April 8, the FBI issued a statement requesting the public's assistance in this on-going investigation. Anyone with information is asked to call the public corruption task force toll free at 1-866-996-4320.

U.S. Attorney Pfannenschmidt praised the team of investigators and prosecutors for their tireless efforts on behalf of the people of Luzerne County. He went on to state, "I am fully committed to continuing the fine work of the office."

This case is part of an on-going investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service and is being prosecuted by a team of federal prosecutors led by Senior Litigation Counsel Gordon Zubrod and includes Assistant U.S. Attorneys William Houser, Michael Consiglio, Amy Phillips and Criminal Division Chief Christian Fisanick.

\*\*\*\*

***An Indictment or Information is not evidence of guilt but simply a description of the charge made by the Grand Jury and/or United States Attorney against a defendant. A charged Defendant is***

*presumed innocent until a jury returns a unanimous finding that the United States has proven the defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt or until the defendant has pled guilty to the charges.*