

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
DISTRICT *of* SOUTH CAROLINA

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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of South Carolina

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, August 14, 2017

Founder, CEO, and Employee of International Adoption Guides (IAG) Sentenced for Adoption Fraud Schemes

Columbia, South Carolina---- United States Attorney Beth Drake stated today that Mary Mooney, age 58, of Mooresville, North Carolina; James Harding, age 57, of Lawrenceville, Georgia; and Alisa Bivens, age 36, of Gastonia, North Carolina were sentenced last week in federal court in Charleston, South Carolina. Mooney was sentenced for Accreditation Fraud regarding adoption conducted in Kazakhstan, in violation of 42 U.S.C. § 14944, and Harding and Bivens were sentenced for conspiring to defraud the United States in connection with adoptions conducted in Ethiopia, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371.

United States District Judge David C. Norton of Charleston sentenced Mary Mooney to 18 months incarceration, 3 years of supervised release, and \$223,946.04 of restitution to victims who adopted children from Kazakhstan. James Harding was sentenced to 12 months incarceration, 3 years supervised release, and \$301,224.25 of restitution. Alisa Bivens, was sentenced to one year probation, and \$31,800 restitution to two victims listed in the Indictment with whom she had direct contact.

Evidence presented at James Harding and Alisa Bivens guilty pleas and sentencing established that they and Mary Mooney on behalf of IAG submitted fraudulent documents to the U.S. Department of State to facilitate adoptions of Ethiopian children by U.S. parents from 2006 until 2009. In support of U.S. visa applications for the Ethiopian children, they submitted false documentation, including contracts of adoption signed by orphanages that could not properly give the children up for adoption because, for example, the child in question was never cared for or never resided at the orphanage. Harding and Bivens admitted to a scheme conducted with Mooney to pay bribes to two Ethiopian officials, a teacher at a government school, and a head of a regional ministry for women's and children's affairs, to facilitate the fraudulent adoptions. Both Harding and Bivens pled guilty and cooperated, providing substantial assistance to the Government.

Evidence presented at Mooney's hearings established that she made false statements to the Council on Accreditation (COA), which granted IAG accreditation to provide adoption services. IAG marketed itself as a COA-accredited adoption services provider and numerous clients relied on IAG's accreditation to confirm IAG's adoption services were ethical and in compliance with the law. Mooney admitted in support of IAG's application for accreditation she made several false representations, including: falsely stating that IAG was in substantial compliance with the relevant regulations; intentionally failing to list her co-defendant, Alisa Bivens, as one of IAG's employees providing adoption services; and intentionally failing to disclose that James Harding, another co-defendant, was the functional director and head of the company. All of these

11/13/2017 Founder, CEO, and Employee of International Adoption Guides (IAG) Sentenced for Adoption Fraud Schemes | USAO-SC | Department of Jus...
false and fraudulent statements were material to COA's decision to accredit IAG to conduct intercountry adoptions.

"The defendants undermined the laws and regulations designed to ensure the integrity of the inter-country adoption process. The Diplomatic Security Service conducted an excellent investigation to uncover the scheme to profit from fraudulently securing the adoption of children, some of the most vulnerable victims in society," stated United States Attorney Beth Drake.

"This sentencing makes a strong statement to those who would attempt to exploit the most vulnerable among us. The Diplomatic Security Service is dedicated to ensuring those who commit these crimes are brought to justice," said Christian J. Schurman, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Programs at the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS). "Our global presence allows DSS to work with both U.S. and foreign law enforcement to stop those who would profit from illicit schemes like fraudulent adoption."

The case was investigated by the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service. Assistant United States Attorney Jamie Lea Schoen of the District of South Carolina and Department of Justice Trial Attorney Derek Ettinger handled the sentencings in this case.

Component(s):

[USAO - South Carolina](#)

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