



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

USCIS Efforts Lead to Sentencing in Florida Marriage Fraud Ring

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Orlando, Fla. – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) assisted in an investigation that led to U.S. District Judge Paul G. Byron sentencing three individuals to federal prison for their involvement in a marriage fraud ring operating out of Brevard County.

William Matthew Tex Price, 31, of Cocoa was sentenced to two years in federal prison for marriage fraud. His sentence will run concurrently with a two-year sentence for possessing a firearm as a convicted felon. Maria Rogacheva, 28, of Russia was sentenced to 5 months' imprisonment and Khagan Mushfig Oglu Nabili, 24, of Azerbaijan was sentenced to time served.

According to court documents, in October 2015, agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations worked with the Brevard County Clerk of the Court to investigate a significant surge in the number of aliens from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other former Soviet countries marrying U.S. citizens in Brevard County. This led to the arrest of Denis Yakovlev, 40, of Russia and Meghan Toole, 28, of Cocoa on July 13, 2016.

After his arrest, Yakovlev admitted to introducing approximately 100 individuals to each other over an 18-month period for the purpose of them entering into sham marriages for immigration benefits. Yakovlev claimed that his payment ranged from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per sham marriage and that the American citizens were paid between \$10,000 and \$20,000 each.

Yakovlev "employed" Price, who recruited at least 20 U.S. citizens to participate in the scheme. In August 2015, Price recruited a U.S. citizen to enter into a sham marriage with Nabili. The citizen then filed an immigration petition on Nabili's behalf in an attempt to obtain lawful status for him. The following month, Price recruited his ex-wife, Toole, to enter into a sham marriage with Bakhranovich Yadigarov, 26, of Uzbekistan. Toole filed an immigration petition on Yadigarov's behalf in an attempt to gain lawful status for him.

Price also entered sham marriages with Maria Rogacheva and Svetlana Vladimirovna Shakhramanyan, 28, of Azerbaijan. Rogacheva attempted to avoid prosecution by filing a lengthy petition falsely claiming to be a battered spouse based on her sham marriage to Price. She later admitted that she had not entered into the marriage in good faith, she had never lived with Price as husband and wife, and she had never been battered by Price.

"Immigration fraud compromises the security of our homeland," said USCIS Tampa Acting District Director Tracy Tarango. "Justice has been served with this sentencing, and USCIS remains vigilant in detecting immigration fraud."

Denis Yakovlev, 40, of Russia and Meghan Toole, 28, of Cocoa previously pleaded guilty for their involvement in this conspiracy. In November 2016, Yakovlev was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment for encouraging or inducing an alien to reside in the United States and Toole was sentenced to 4 months' imprisonment for marriage fraud.

April Coleen Moore, 24, of Satellite Beach pleaded guilty on January 2, 2018, for her sham marriage to Valriy Tsoy, 33, of Kazakhstan. Her sentencing hearing is on March 23, 2018. Tsoy, Yadigarov and

Shakhramanyan are set for trial in May 2018.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

This case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations Enforcement and Removal Operations, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services - Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate, the Brevard County Sheriff's Office and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. It is being prosecuted by Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Christina R. Downes who is on assignment from the Office of the Principal Legal Advisor, ICE.

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