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Former ICE Chief Counsel Sentenced to Four Years in Prison for Wire Fraud and Aggravated Identity Theft Scheme

Former Chief Counsel Raphael A. Sanchez of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Office of Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA) was sentenced to 48 months in prison for a wire fraud and aggravated identity theft scheme involving the identities of numerous aliens, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General John P. Cronan of the Justice Department's Criminal Division and ICE Principal Legal Advisor Tracy Short.

Sanchez, 44, of Seattle, Washington, pleaded guilty on Feb. 24, to one count of wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. In addition to the prison term, U.S. District Court Judge Robert S. Lasnik of the Western District of Washington ordered Sanchez to pay \$190,345.63 in restitution.

"Raphael Sanchez was entrusted with overseeing the honest enforcement of our country's immigration laws," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Cronan. "Instead, Sanchez abused that trust, and capitalized on his position at ICE to exploit his victims and line his own pockets."

"ICE employees are required to ensure honest enforcement of more than 400 laws," said ICE Principal Legal Advisor Short. "We cannot let one bad actor detract from the work the agency's dedicated employees in Seattle and across the world are doing to ensure our national security and uphold public safety. Our employees are held to the highest standards of professional conduct. Individuals who violate the public's trust will face consequences for their actions, as Mr. Sanchez did in this case. Corruption will not be tolerated."

Sanchez, who was responsible for immigration removal proceedings in Alaska, Oregon and Washington, admitted in his plea agreement that he intentionally devised a scheme to defraud aliens in various stages of immigration removal proceedings with ICE. Sanchez used the personally identifiable information of those aliens to open lines of credit and personal loans in their names, manipulate their credit bureau files, transfer funds to himself and to purchase goods for himself using credit cards issued in their names.

Sanchez admitted that he obtained personally identifiable information of the victim aliens by using ICE's official computer database systems and by accessing their official, hard-copy immigration A-files. He then used his work computer to forge identification documents, including Social Security cards and Washington State driver's licenses, in the victims' names. Sanchez used these forged documents to open credit card and bank accounts subject to his own control in the names of the aliens.

To further the scheme, Sanchez listed his residence as the aliens' home addresses on account paperwork. In some cases, he created public utility account statements in their names to provide the necessary proof of residence to open lines of credit in their names or to conceal the scheme. He also opened e-mail and online financial accounts in the names of several aliens, and manufactured a false earnings-and-leave statement in the name of an alien and registered a car in her name.

Once the accounts were approved and opened, Sanchez made charges or drew payments totaling more than \$190,000 in the names of aliens to himself or entities that he controlled, often using PayPal and mobile point-of-sale devices from Amazon, Square, Venmo and Coin to process the fraudulent transactions. In a number of cases, Sanchez purchased goods online in the names of aliens and had them shipped to his residence. Sanchez also employed credit-monitoring

services and corresponded with credit bureaus in the names of aliens to conceal his fraud scheme. Sanchez also claimed three aliens as relative dependents on his tax returns for 2014, 2015, and 2016.

ICE's Office of Professional Responsibility, the FBI, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service investigated the case. Trial Attorneys Luke Cass and Jessica C. Harvey of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section prosecuted the case.

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