

Six of 10 in Immigration-Marriage Scam Plead Guilty - MabuhayRadio

Written by

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By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – Six of ten defendants in an alleged marriage-fraud conspiracy to evade immigration laws and enable foreign nationals, mostly Filipinos, to illegally become U.S.

citizens had pleaded guilty, according to court documents obtained by this reporter.

The four others, including a Filipino-American lawyer specializing in immigration cases, have not signed plea agreements and are going to stand trial starting April 25, 2011, according to Assistant United States Attorney Jason A. Yonan in a phone interview with this reporter.

Reached for comment, Filipino-American lawyer Manny Aguja, 53, told this reporter he is not going to plead guilty, saying “I am ready to face trial” before United States District Judge Samuel Der-Yeghian of the Northern District of Illinois in Chicago.

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The six defendants who pleaded guilty in their individual plea agreements they signed were Latrice Wilson, 37, of Chicago; Maria F. Cruz, 49, formerly of Chicago and currently living in American Canyon, California, and formerly a Cook County Traffic employee; Sonia Maki, 43, of Chicago; DeShawn Barksdale, 39, Maria Cyd Adriatico-Fernandez, 53, of Oakbrook, Illinois; and Keisha McGary, 33, of Chicago and Cook County employee.

The four others, who have not yet signed pleas and are going to stand trial on April 25, aside from Attorney Aguja, are Aguja's twin brother, Marc Aguja, 53; Celeste Ligutan-Lopez, 36; and Latrice Wilson's brother, Eugene Wilson, 37, all of Chicago.

SENTENCING SCHEDULES

For those who pleaded guilty, sentencing is slated on March 15, 2011 at 9:30 a.m. for Latrice Wilson; on April 6 at 11 a.m. for Maria Cruz; April 19 at 10:30 a.m. for Sonia Maki; April 20 at 10 a.m. for DeShawn Barksdale; April 21 at 10 a.m. for Maria Cyd-Adriatico; and on April 21 at 11 a.m. for Keisha McGary.

All of the six defendants, including Cruz, had entered voluntary plea of guilty to the charge of

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conspiracy to commit marriage fraud in violation of Title 18, U.S. Code, Sec. 371 (count one).

At the sentencing, all defendants face maximum of five years imprisonment, a maximum fine of \$250,000, not more than three years of supervised release and \$100 assessment fee. But the judge has option to reduce the sentence if defendant “has clearly demonstrated a recognition and affirmative acceptance of personal responsibility” for their criminal records, including furnishing the U.S. Attorney’s and Probation offices “with financial information relevant to their ability to satisfy any fine that maybe imposed, a two-level reduction in the offense level.”

If the defendants’ criminal “history points” are zero and criminal history category” are I, the “anticipated offense level 9, which when combined with anticipated criminal history category I means four to ten months’ imprisonment, in addition to any supervised release and fine.”

But in the case of Maria Cruz, she faces an additional charge of “committing, aiding or abetting marriage fraud” after pleading guilty to Count One (conspiracy to commit marriage fraud) of the indictment.

It was Ms. Cruz, who beginning in July 2003 and up to Oct. 2009 in Chicago, who knowingly arranged marriages of

U.S.

citizens for the purpose of evading immigration laws in order to obtain legal permanent-resident status with foreign nationals, mostly Filipinos, upon payment by the foreign nationals for

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\$10,000.

CRUZ FACES ADDITIONAL IMPRISONMENT

Ms. Cruz faces an “advisory guideline range of 27 to 33 months’ imprisonment based on an adjusted offense level 18.”

In her plea deal, Latrice Wilson said, “with co-defendants Maria Cruz, Manny Aguja, Marc Aguja, Celeste Ligutan-Lopez, Maria Cyd Adriatico-Fernandez, Sonia Maki, DeShawn Barksdale, Keisha McGary and Eugene Wilson,” she did “knowingly conspire to commit certain offenses against the U.S.”

Wilson said it was Maria Cruz who solicited her as part into sham marriage while the two of them worked together at the Traffic Division of the Cook County Circuit at the Daley Center in Chicago for \$10,000.

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After thinking over the offer for sometime, Cruz introduced her to the foreign national identified only as "EI." Cruz told EI that he would pay Wilson \$3,000 to \$4,000 at the time of the wedding and \$500 monthly thereafter.

On June 24, 2004, Wilson and EI obtained a marriage license at the Daley Center. On June 26, 2004, Wilson and EI, with Cruz as witness, married EI in a civil ceremony at the Daley Center.

Following the wedding, Wilson and EI along with others went to lunch at a restaurant, where EI paid defendant \$3,500. To make the marriage appear legitimate, they needed to get bills in both of their names; put EI's address on Wilson's ID, get car insurance together and get joint bank accounts.

After the wedding, EI started paying defendant \$500 a month, often in cash at work, from Cruz. Wilson got the last payment of \$300 in or about May 2009.

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On June 28, 2004, Wilson signed a I-130 Petition for Alien Relative Form on behalf of EI, where she falsely indicated that she and EI lived together continuously although they never did.

They were interviewed by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services on March 10, 2005.

Wilson was assisted in her defense by Atty. Jerry Bischoff. # # #

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