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Monday, July 10, 2017

Former Businessman's Probation Revoked, Sentenced to Prison in \$1M Food Stamp Fraud Scheme

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – The former owner of a Providence convenience store who admitted to masterminding a \$1.1 million dollar scheme to defraud the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has been sentenced to 31 months in federal prison, after a court imposed sentence of five-year probation with intermittent confinement was revoked at the government's request.

In October 2016, Sami Almuhtaseb, 46, of Providence, a former owner of Oasis Market in Providence, was sentenced to five years probation with 730 days intermittent confinement at the Wyatt Detention Center. The intermittent sentence was imposed to permit Almuhtaseb to continue to operate his business. It was later determined by investigators that prior to sentencing, Almuhtaseb had divested himself of his businesses, a fact that he failed to disclose to the court, U.S. Probation or the United States Attorney's Office at sentencing.

At the government's request, the court revoked Almuhtaseb's probation for committing fraud on the court, and sentenced him to federal prison. At the June 30, 2017 sentencing, U.S. District Court Chief Judge William E. Smith also ordered Almuhtaseb to serve 3 years supervised release upon completion of his prison term and to pay restitution to SNAP in the amount of \$1,188,729. Almuhtaseb pleaded guilty on April 15, 2016, to conspiracy to commit Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program fraud and money laundering.

The U.S. Sentencing Guideline range revised to reflect the defendant's obstruction of justice in this matter is 37- 46 months imprisonment. The government recommended a sentence of 37 months imprisonment.



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Almuhtaseb's sentence is announced by Acting United States Attorney Stephen G. Dambruch; Bethanne M. Dinkins, Special Agent in Charge of the Northeast Region of the United States Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General; and Harold H. Shaw, Special Agent in Charge of the Boston Field Office of the FBI.

According to court documents, between November 2009 and December 2015, the defendant's store redeemed \$2,755,125 in SNAP benefits. Over \$1,259,320, or 45% of the food stamp transactions, were for transactions of \$100 or more. Over 72% of the SNAP transactions at the store were from transactions in excess of \$50. Legitimate SNAP transactions at a convenience store rarely involve a transaction of \$50 or more.

An investigation by the United States Attorney's Office, the Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General and the FBI determined that at least \$1.1 million dollars of SNAP funds received by Almuhtaseb were the result of fraudulent transactions. These fraudulently obtained funds were deposited into bank accounts controlled by Almuhtaseb, from which the defendant withdrew over \$770,000 in cash or checks payable to himself.

An analysis of bank records performed by the FBI revealed that Almuhtaseb used a significant portion of fraudulently obtained funds to gamble, acquire real estate and pay for personal entertainment expenses. The FBI analysis showed that among the expenditures, Almuhtaseb used nearly \$200,000 of fraudulently gained funds at casinos, paid over \$160,000 in mortgages, and used at least \$35,000 for entertainment, credit card bills and shopping.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sandra R. Hebert.

Topic(s):

Financial Fraud

Component(s):

USAO - Rhode Island

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