



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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DOI ARRESTS 2 HOMEOWNERS & PROPERTY MANAGER IN BRIBERY "STINGS" ***-- Paid Undercover HPD Inspectors To Ignore Housing Code Violations In Queens --***

EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of KAZI AHMED and BIBI MURSALIM, both homeowners, and JIMMY PORTONOVA, a property management agent, for separately paying bribes ranging from \$180 to nearly \$300 to undercover City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) inspectors working with DOI. The payoffs allegedly were in return for the inspectors not reporting serious housing code violations on three different Queens properties.

Commissioner Kuriansky said, "These arrests are part of DOI's ongoing effort to deter municipal corruption and should serve as a fair warning to any citizen who might even be tempted to bribe a City worker. In each case, the HPD employee who initially received the corrupt offer immediately reported it to DOI. Their actions are to be commended. They represent the overwhelming majority of good, honest, and decent City employees."

In the first case, an HPD code enforcement inspector reported to DOI that, on July 7, 2000, while carrying out a routine dismissal request inspection, he was offered money by PORTONOVA, a property manager, to overlook an uncapped gas line in the basement of a 2-family house at 116-35 198th Street in St. Albans, Queens. The inspector refused the offer.

Thereafter, on July 10, 2000, DOI sent an undercover HPD inspector, wearing a concealed recording device, to the 198th Street premises. PORTONOVA met the undercover, who, during a re-inspection, also found the uncapped gas line. PORTONOVA then allegedly pulled cash from his pocket and offered to pay the undercover to ignore the violation. When PORTONOVA realized that he had only \$94, he asked the undercover to accompany him to a nearby ATM machine, where he withdrew an additional \$200. PORTONOVA then handed the entire amount, \$294, to the undercover, with the understanding that the inspector would not report the uncapped gas line.

In the second case, an HPD code enforcement inspector notified DOI that, on August 4, 2000, when he conducted a routine dismissal request inspection of a 3-family multiple dwelling at 84-66 169th Street in Jamaica, Queens, and discovered an illegal basement apartment, the homeowner, AHMED, had offered him an envelope "to buy some lunch." The inspector refused the offer.

Thereafter, on August 25, 2000, DOI sent an undercover HPD inspector, wearing a concealed recording

device, to the 169th Street premises. AHMED met the undercover, who, during a re-inspection, also found the illegal apartment. When the inspector told AHMED that he would have to issue a violation, AHMED gave the undercover \$180 cash not to report the illegal apartment.

In the third case, an HPD inspector informed DOI that, on November 2, 2000, while conducting an inspection in response to an anonymous complaint about an illegal apartment, MURSALIM, the homeowner, had placed \$200 cash in the inspector's hand and asked him to remove all existing violations against the 2-family house at 107-04 103rd Street in Ozone Park, Queens. The inspector refused the money.

Thereafter, on December 15, 2000, DOI sent an undercover inspector, wearing a concealed recording device, to the 103rd Street premises. MURSALIM met the undercover, who conducted a re-inspection and found the illegal basement apartment. MURSALIM then handed the inspector \$200 cash, and asked him to remove all existing violations and not report the unauthorized apartment.

PORTONOVA, 41, of 31 Martin Lane in Westbury, Long Island, and AHMED, 35, of 84-66 169th Street, and MURSALIM, 40, of 107-04 103rd Street, both in Queens, have each been charged with Bribery in the Third Degree, a Class D felony punishable by up to 7 years in prison.

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to HPD Commissioner Jerilyn Perine and members of her staff for their cooperation and assistance in the investigation.

The investigations were conducted by Brian D. Foley, DOI's Inspector General for HPD, and members of his staff, including First Deputy Inspector General Francis A. Sinatra, Assistant Inspector General Daniel Alejandro, Special Investigators David Jordan and Daniel Tanaka, and Confidential Investigator Benjamin Wilson.

The Office of the Queens County District Attorney Richard A. Brown is prosecuting the cases. Assistant District Attorney Yvonne Creque of the DA's Integrity Bureau is handling the matters.

Members of the public are reminded that a complaint is merely an accusation and is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial in which it is the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.