



Department of Investigation

Press Release

Release #019-99

DOI SHUTS DOWN HARLEM "CASINO" IN CITY-OWNED BUILDING; SQUATTER ARRESTED ON GAMBLING AND BRIBERY CHARGES

MONDAY, APRIL 26, 1999 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of NELSON A. URENA, a squatter, for running an illegal gambling business in a City-owned residential building in Harlem and for paying off an undercover agent, posing as a City employee, not to report the existence of the gambling operation.

The investigation began last May when a Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) employee reported a squatter operating an illegal gambling business out of a storefront at 1411 Fifth Avenue, a building owned and managed by HPD. DOI then sent an undercover investigator to the building posing as an HPD inspector. During the inspection, the agent observed policy betting slips and a "joker poker" machine. Later, URENA paid the undercover a \$200 cash bribe in return for not reporting the illegal gambling operation. URENA also indicated that he would be willing to make future payments to protect his business at the site.

On June 11, 1998, the undercover returned to the building and met again with URENA, who gave the agent another \$200 cash payoff in exchange for not taking any action to evict him.

NELSON URENA, 36, of 88-38 50th Avenue in Elmhurst, Queens, was charged with Bribery in the Third Degree and Promoting Gambling in the Second Degree. If convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

The investigation was conducted by Brian D. Foley, DOI's Inspector General for HPD, and members of his staff, including Assistant Inspector General Daniel Alejandro and Special Investigators Caroline Tang and John Bavuso.

The Office of New York County District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney Samantha Hankins, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Tom Wornom, Deputy Chief of the Special Prosecutions Bureau, is handling the matter.