

Wilmington Woman Pleads Guilty To Immigration Marriage Fraud

By Administrator

Thursday, 28 November 2019 07:30 - Last Updated Thursday, 28 November 2019 07:32

United States Attorney Robert J. Higdon, Jr., announced in federal court, MARILYN GODSHALL, age 61, of Wilmington, North Carolina, pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting fraudulent statements. Additionally, United States Magistrate Judge Robert B. Jones, Jr. sentenced GODSHALL to 12 months of probation. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) initiated an inquiry into GODSHALL based on a fraudulent marriage between her daughter, Melissa Godshall, a United States citizen, and Levan Lomtatidze, a citizen of the Republic of Georgia. A lead suggested that Melissa Godshall was married to Lomtatidze but also shared an address with her real boyfriend, Robert Kennerley.

During the course of this investigation, HSI agents discovered that Melissa Godshall and Kennerley were panhandling for money on the side of the road in Granville County, North Carolina, when Tojiddin Rahimov, a naturalized United States citizen from Tajikistan, approached them and asked Melissa Godshall if she would be willing to marry a foreign-born national for money. Melissa Godshall agreed to engage in the marriage to Lomtatidze in exchange for \$12,000, housing, and a vehicle. Lomtatidze and Melissa Godshall got married in Granville County, North Carolina. Kennerley and another individual witnessed the marriage ceremony.

HSI agents confirmed that Lomtatidze, Melissa Godshall and Kennerley entered into a rental agreement for a house located in Raleigh, North Carolina. Lomtatidze, as part of the payment for the sham marriage, paid for the rent. Thereafter, Godshall and Lomtatidze submitted fraudulent applications to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) requesting Lomtatidze's adjustment of status as a lawful permanent resident (green card holder) in the United States. Lomtatidze and Melissa Godshall were interviewed at the USCIS office in Durham, North Carolina. Both attested under oath they were married in good faith. Because of the interview, USCIS approved the request and Lomtatidze was granted "conditional" resident status in the United States.

On September 18, 2017, GODSHALL prepared a statement in support of Lomtatidze's application for "unconditional" permanent residence. GODSHALL purported the marriage to be legitimate while knowing the marriage was entered into for the purpose of evading the application of immigration laws.

Later, Lomtatidze and Melissa Godshall submitted to USCIS the application requesting Lomtatidze's removal of conditions on his resident status, including GODSHALL's statement in support of the petition, attesting Lomtatidze and Melissa Godshall were still married in good faith.

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On August 27, 2019, Lomtadze was sentenced for conspiracy to commit marriage fraud by United States District Judge Louise W. Flanagan. He was also ordered deported from the United States. On the same date, Melissa Godshall was sentenced to four months in the custody of the United States Bureau of Prisons, consecutive to any other term of imprisonment.

On June 19, 2019 and July 11, 2019, Kennerly and Rahimov pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit marriage fraud. They are presently awaiting sentencing.

The Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force (DBFTF) in the Eastern District of North Carolina led by Homeland Security Investigations and the USCIS's Fraud Detection and National Security investigated the case.