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Orange County Man Sentenced to over 9 Years for Operating Fake Law Firms that Promised to Help Struggling Homeowners

SANTA ANA, California – A Brea man was sentenced today to 109 months in custody for operating a multi-million dollar fraudulent mortgage modification scheme that posed as a successful law firm.

Bryan D'Antonio, 50, was sentenced by United States District Judge David O. Carter, who ordered the defendant to spend 97 months in federal prison and to serve the final year of the sentence in a halfway house. In addition to the sentence of over eight years, Judge Carter ordered D'Antonio to pay \$3,826,977 in restitution.

D'Antonio pleaded guilty last August to one count of conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud in relation to his role as owner and operator of Rodis Law Group (RLG) and America's Law Group (ALG). D'Antonio admitted that, between October 2008 and June 2009, he participated in a scheme that induced homeowners to pay between \$3,500 and \$5,500 for the services of RLG and its successor entity, ALG.

In connection with his guilty plea, D'Antonio admitted that the RLG and ALG schemes fraudulently obtained approximately \$9 million from more than 1,500 victims.

RLG and ALG advertised on radio stations nationwide, urging struggling homeowners to call a toll-free number and stating that the companies consisted of "a team of experienced attorneys" who were "highly skilled in negotiating lower interest rates and even lowering your principal balance." In fact, RLG and ALG were telemarketing operations that never had teams of experienced attorneys.

D'Antonio was previously convicted of mail and wire fraud and was sentenced to four years in federal prison for his participation in a medical billing scheme. He was also subject to a permanent injunction prohibiting him from having any involvement with any business that engaged in telemarketing or misrepresented the services it would provide.

D'Antonio admitted that he started RLG while he was still on supervised release from his prior conviction. And, in violation of the permanent injunction, RLG and ALG sold their services through an extensive telemarketing operation in which employees routinely misrepresented the services RLG and ALG would provide.

“While still under court supervision after serving a prison term in another telemarketing case, D'Antonio oversaw what was essentially a boiler room operation that preyed upon struggling homeowners,” said Acting United States Attorney Sandra R. Brown. “Hundreds of victims lost millions of dollars after D'Antonio's employees told a series of lies that misrepresented nearly every aspect of the business. Today's lengthy sentence will ensure that he will not have the opportunity to defraud unsuspecting victims for many years.”

“This defendant – a repeat telemarketing fraudster - took advantage of vulnerable homeowners facing foreclosure during the mortgage crisis,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Chad A. Readler of the Justice Department's Civil Division. “His two fake law firms promised homeowners assistance saving their homes and modifying their mortgages. The sad reality is both firms were nothing more than telemarketing scams.”

RLG and ALG telemarketers working for D'Antonio made numerous misrepresentations regarding the companies' ability to negotiate loan modifications for homeowners. For example, the telemarketers falsely stated that RLG and ALG routinely obtained positive results for homeowners, including lower monthly payments, reductions in principal balance and lower interest rates. In fact, positive results were rarely achieved for any RLG or ALG clients. Telemarketers also falsely reiterated that homeowners would have a team of attorneys and real estate professionals assigned to their cases. The telemarketers did not disclose to homeowners that RLG and ALG were owned and operated by D'Antonio, a convicted felon who was prohibited from engaging in telemarketing.

“Mr. D'Antonio preyed upon victims who were already experiencing difficult circumstances and robbed them of their remaining financial resources,” said Deirdre L. Fike, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office. “Homeowners seeking financial assistance should thoroughly investigate businesses before investing their money in advance of receiving services.”

D'Antonio's was charged along with two co-defendants – Charles Wayne Farris and Ronald Rodis – both of whom pleaded guilty last year to conspiring to commit mail and wire fraud. Farris and Rodis are scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Carter on May 1.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which received the assistance of IRS Criminal Investigation.

“Mr. D'Antonio masterminded a scheme that stole nearly \$9 million from homeowners across the country who were already on the verge of losing their homes,” stated IRS Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge R. Damon Rowe. “Taxpayers deserve our vigilance in the investigation and prosecution of individuals who profit from such unscrupulous acts.”

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph T. McNally of the Santa Ana Branch Office and Trial Attorney John W. Burke of the Civil Division's Consumer Protection Branch.