

NEWS

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**ADDITIONAL INDICTMENTS AND CHARGES FILED IN NEW ORLEANS TRAFFIC COURT INVESTIGATION**

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA - Jim Letten, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana, and James Bernizanni, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation announced today that a federal grand jury has indicted three more individuals who worked in Orleans Parish Traffic Court. Also, a separate Bill of Information was filed charging a fourth individual, a former New Orleans Assistant City Attorney. ANTHONY THOMAS, former Chief Clerk for Section B in Orleans Parish Traffic Court; ALVIN WEDDLE, former Assistant City Attorney for Orleans Parish; WILLIAM EVANS, former Deputy Clerk/Cashier for Orleans Parish Traffic Court, Algiers Courthouse; and RONNIE OWENS were charged today as a result their involvement in and knowledge of others accepting bribes or payoffs in exchange for dismissing traffic tickets. These charges follow the recent indictments and convictions of former Assistant City Attorney EDWIN E. BURKS; former Supervisor of Community Service for Criminal District Court and Orleans Parish Traffic Court, JAMES W. LEE; former Secretary for Section D, MICKEY TORREGANO; former Minute Clerk for Section D, BERNETTA J. CLAILBORNE; former Court Reporter for Section D, GLENDA HAMLIN; and former Grounds Patrol Officer for Orleans Parish Traffic Court, BOBBY GRANT, who were all indicted and have entered pleas of guilty for their involvement in a scheme to accept cash bribes or payoffs in exchange for dismissing traffic tickets.

ANTHONY "TONY" THOMAS and RONNIE OWENS, of New Orleans have been indicted for Conspiracy to commit Computer Fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371. Additionally, WILLIAM EVANS, of New Orleans, Louisiana, has been indicted for violation of the Federal Computer Fraud Statute, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1030(a)(4). Also, a Bill of Information has been filed against former Assistant City Attorney ALVIN WEDDLE, charging him with violating the Federal Computer Fraud Statute. If convicted, THOMAS, OWENS, EVANS and WEDDLE could face a maximum sentence of five (5) years incarceration, up to a \$250,000 fine and up to three (3) years of supervised release following any term of imprisonment.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) along with the U. S. Attorney's Office has been conducting an undercover investigation into New Orleans Traffic Court for the past year and a half. According to the indictment, the FBI utilized hidden video, audio equipment and cooperating witnesses to record numerous Traffic Court employees and public officials, all of whom knowingly and intentionally solicited cash bribes and/or other kickbacks for the unauthorized dismissal of traffic citations. The U. S. Attorney's Office and the FBI will continue with the investigation.

WILLIAM EVANS was employed as a Deputy Clerk/Cashier for Orleans Parish Traffic Court, Algiers Courthouse. EVANS worked for the City of New Orleans for the past nine (9) years.

According to the indictment, WILLIAM EVANS, on or about August 28, 2004, and continuously thereafter until on or about April 7, 2005, agreed to dismiss a New Orleans Traffic Court case in exchange for a monetary bribe.

ANTHONY THOMAS was employed as the Chief Clerk for Section B Parish of Orleans Traffic Court. Prior to his promotion, THOMAS was employed as a cashier for Traffic Court. RONNIE OWENS was self-employed as a "ticket fixer" for the past three (3) years. Previously, OWENS was employed as a Budget Director by the Orleans

Parish City Attorney's Office and by the New Orleans Police Department. According to the indictment, ANTHONY THOMAS and RONNIE OWENS from on or about July 23, 2003, and continuously thereafter until on or about September 24, 2003, conspired to dismiss a Traffic Court case for money.

ALVIN WEDDLE, an attorney licensed to practice law in Louisiana, has been with the City Attorney's Office for the past thirty (30) years. For the past thirty years, WEDDLE has been assigned to Section D of Traffic Court. On or about January 9, 2004, and continuously thereafter until on or about February 9, 2004, WEDDLE agreed to "nolle prosequi" or dismiss prosecution of traffic tickets in exchange for cash "loans".

As a result of these offenses, these individuals caused the transmission of inaccurate and incomplete data to the Driver Management Database, a protected computer utilized by the State of Louisiana, Office of Motor Vehicles (OMV) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Driver Management Database contains the driving records of Louisiana drivers. All state and federal law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and other approved governmental agencies access the OMV's Driver Management Database to obtain information on individual driving records. In addition, the OMV has the legal obligation to provide driving records to insurance companies.

The U. S. Attorney reminds citizens that an indictment and a bill of information are accusations, and that every defendant so charged is, under our Constitution, presumed innocent until proven guilty.

According to U.S. Attorney Jim Letten, "the pursuit and prosecution of anyone involved in public corruption in the City of New Orleans will be investigated by the FBI and will be vigorously prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office. With the help of the community, the U.S. Attorney's Office hopes to accomplish its goal of making New Orleans a better and safer place to live, one free of violence, corruption, and intimidation."

Pursuant to federal law, ANTHONY THOMAS, RONNIE OWENS, WILLIAM EVANS, and ALVIN WEDDLE will be required to appear before a United States Magistrate Judge in order to be formally arraigned on these charges. All of the other defendants previously indicted by the U. S. Attorney's Office have pleaded guilty as charged.

Prosecution of these cases and all of the cases arising out of the New Orleans Traffic Court investigation are being handled by Senior Litigation Counsel Albert J. Winters, Jr. and Assistant U. S. Attorney Brian M. Klebba.

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