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News Releases

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Washington man who filed false immigration claims pleads guilty ***Defendant advised immigration to lie about sexual orientation***

SEATTLE - An immigration consultant who assisted immigrants with filing fraudulent immigration claims pleaded guilty today in federal court to charges of conspiracy to commit immigration fraud, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Steven Mahoney, 41, of Kent, Wash., ran an immigration consulting business where he advised and prepared immigration applications for aliens seeking legal status to live in the United States.

According to court documents, from October 1998 until June 2007, Mahoney filed up to 99 false asylum claims on behalf of aliens. The applications falsely stated the individuals would be abused because they were homosexual or they held religious or political views that would result in torture in their home countries.

Mahoney's ex-wife and co-defendant, Helen Mahoney, assisted with completing and submitting the false applications to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), the federal agency that processes these documents. Court documents show the defendants knew the statements were not true for certain applicants, but filed the claims anyway. Helen Mahoney is scheduled to plead guilty to similar charges later this week.

Mahoney was paid between \$1,000 and \$4,000 per application and he coached the applicants on how to pursue immigration status based on these false claims.

"ICE strives to protect the integrity of our nation's immigration system by investigating those who engage in this type of fraudulent and illegal activity," said Leigh Winchell, special agent in charge of ICE's Office of Investigations in Seattle. "ICE will continue to identify, arrest and bring to justice those who are involved in these schemes."

Mahoney faces up to five years in prison when he is sentenced August 21, 2009. ICE was joined in this investigation by USCIS.

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-- ICE --

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.

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