

Attachment A

Real Estate Fraud Prosecution
Program Fiscal Year 2019-2020
Annual Report



District Attorney's Real Estate Fraud Prosecution Program Fiscal Year 2019 - 2020 Annual Report

Cases

- *People v. Anthony Allen Robinson and Heather June Robinson*

Based on reports from the Lompoc Police Department, the Contractor's State Licensing Board, and numerous citizen complaints, the District Attorney's Real Estate Fraud (REF) Unit investigated allegations against a Lompoc couple, Anthony Allen Robinson and Heather June Robinson. The investigation culminated in the couple being charged with 24 felony counts including Securities Fraud, Diversion of Construction Funds, Grand Theft, Offering a False Instruments for Recording, and Conspiracy to Commit Unlicensed Contracting. Special Allegations alleging excessive taking were also filed.

After the case was filed, the District Attorney's Office identified numerous potential additional victims. Based on an exhaustive investigation, the District Attorney's Office filed a 73-count information. The information included 35 different victims, and charged all the counts in the complaint plus money laundering, unlawful money transmission, fraudulent use of an access card, and fraudulent use of a contractor's license number. The victims in this case are from Castaic, which is located in Los Angeles County.

As of the *Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Real Estate Fraud Prosecution Program Annual Report*, defendant Anthony Allen Robinson plead guilty to conspiracy to commit contracting without a license, grand theft by false pretenses, securities fraud, conspiracy to commit unlawful money transmission, and procuring a false instrument for recording. He was sentenced to five years of felony probation, including 365 days in County jail. More significantly, he stipulated to the re-payment, as restitution, for all the money he received for unlicensed contracting. He also stipulated to turn over title of a mobile home that he was wrongfully withholding from an elderly disabled man. That victim now has full title his home.

Concurrently, co-defendant Heather June Robinson plead guilty to conspiracy to commit contracting without a license and securities fraud. She received five years of felony probation.

- *People vs. Brandy Taylor*

This investigation involved an Orange County company which, for a fee, offered to stop foreclosures. They operated throughout California, Arizona, and Nevada. In reality, this company was not actually stopping foreclosures but rather postponing them by employing a complex "bankruptcy hijacking" scheme.

In October 2016, the REF Unit coordinated with Alameda County District Attorney Investigators, Orange County DA, the Bureau of Real Estate, and Huntington Beach Police to serve search warrants in Orange County associated with this case. Defendant Brandy Taylor was later arrested on a \$360,000 warrant issued by Santa Barbara County, and a \$1 million dollar warrant issued by Alameda County.

As of the *Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Real Estate Fraud Prosecution Program Annual Report*, the defendant pled guilty to three counts of procuring a false instrument for recording and one count of conspiracy to procure a false instrument for recording, all of which were felonies. She admitted the white collar fraud enhancement. The case is pending sentencing.

- *People vs. Bretton Warren*
Based on a citizen complaint, the REF Unit investigated an allegation that Bretton Warren was threatening to record fraudulent mechanics liens against a former client. Felony charges of Extortion, Forgery, and Filing a False Workman's Compensation Claim were ultimately filed against the defendant. As of the *Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Real Estate Fraud Prosecution Program Annual Report*, the defendant pled guilty to felony attempted extortion. This case is pending sentencing.
- *People v. Mark Melchiori*
In association with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, the REF Unit investigated allegations against local contractor Mark Melchiori of Melchiori Construction. The investigation culminated with Melchiori being charged with 47 felony counts including Diversion of Construction Funds, Theft by Embezzlement, and Labor Code section 1778 (a form of theft from employees). Special Allegations alleging excessive taking were also filed. The District Attorney's Office filed a motion to freeze Melchiori's assets pending the outcome of the prosecution.

As of the *Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Real Estate Fraud Prosecution Program Annual Report*, the defendant pled guilty to diversion of construction funds, prevailing wage fraud, and unlawful money transmission, all of which were felonies. He also admitted the white collar fraud enhancement. On February 21, 2020, the defendant was sentenced to 9 years, 4 months in state prison.

Highlights

- The REF Unit spent a significant amount of time at the County Clerk-Recorder-Assessor's Office during Fiscal Year 2019-2020. Four years ago, a protocol was implemented wherein the District Attorney's REF Investigator would make personal contact with individuals attempting to record false documents in order to stop a foreclosure. The REF Investigator would educate these individuals on the laws that apply to such transactions, and warn them of the consequences associated with attempting illegal recordings. These efforts have continued to payoff, as seen by the continued decrease in the number of fraud referrals as compared to prior fiscal years.

Statistics

- Total number of referrals: 12
- Total number of investigations: 12
- Total number of cases filed: 0
- Number of convictions obtained in the fiscal year: 5