

Immigration Scam

Feds charge 33 with green card bribery scheme

By Patricia Hurtado

STAFF WRITER

Federal prosecutors yesterday announced that 33 people, including seven Immigration and Naturalization Service employees, were charged in a bribery scheme to issue green cards and temporary travel documents to immigrants.

The defendants were so brazen, federal officials said, that bribes ranging from \$200 to \$3,000 changed hands in the bathrooms at INS regional headquarters at 26 Federal Plaza in lower Manhattan, on the sidewalks outside the building and at a McDonald's across the street.

U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White said the investigation started after INS employees told their superiors of their suspicions. She said it led to the largest arrest of INS workers in New York.

In addition to the federal employees, the defendants included immigration "brokers," who operated largely from travel agencies, and one immigration lawyer. White said 30 to 50 immigrants who received green cards from allegedly corrupt INS employees also were being investigated.

Twenty-three people were arrested yesterday in connection with the scheme; the others remain at large. The defendants face a variety of charges, including conspiracy, bribery, processing false INS documents and engaging in a commercial enterprise designed to evade U.S. immigration laws. If convicted, each faces up to 5 to 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for each count.

White said that during a year-long undercover probe, several INS employees arrested for accepting bribes began cooperating with the government. While



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U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White said undercover operation led to the largest arrest ever of INS officers in New York.

working undercover, they accepted more than \$100,000 in cash bribes from various defendants, White said.

The alleged scheme centered on INS employees called district adjudication officers (DAOs), who interview immigrants seeking green cards. White said that under normal circumstances, a green card is issued after one of the officers interviews the immigrant and determines he or she meets the requirements, such as being married to a U.S. citizen, employed as a religious worker or the parent of a U.S. citizen.

But White said corrupt DAOs were bribed by

brokers to expedite an alien's green card application. The rate averaged about \$1,000 per application but went as high as \$3,000, she said.

The INS employees indicted yesterday were Isaac Goddard, 47, of Brooklyn; Abdul Latif Abdul Salam, 43, of the Bronx; Fernando Cintron, 25, of the Bronx, and Anthony Holness, 32, of the Bronx; and three workers whose ages and addresses were not available, Shawn Davis, Celeste Prather and Heylin Cabrera.

Lou Schiliro, head of the FBI's New York Office, called the charges "troubling" because they tainted

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