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USCIS Helps Detect Marriage Fraud Ring

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The Bridgeport resident pleaded guilty to arranging numerous fraudulent marriages so noncitizens could obtain Green Cards.

NEW HAVEN, Conn. ? John H. Durham, United States attorney for the District of Connecticut; the acting special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Boston; and a supervisory immigration officer for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Office of Fraud Detection and National Security (FDNS), announced that Jodian Stephenson, also known as ?Jodian Gordon,? 35, of Bridgeport, pleaded guilty on Aug. 19, in New Haven federal court to a conspiracy charge stemming from her arrangement of numerous fraudulent marriages so that non-U.S. citizens would receive U.S. immigration benefits.

USCIS officials within the FDNS Directorate learned of the potential fraudulent marriages to obtain Green Card benefits in 2016 and began collaborating with HSI investigators to reveal numerous cases of marriage fraud.

?We at USCIS take marriage fraud ? and all fraud ? seriously,? said USCIS Acting Director Ken Cuccinelli. ?I commend the professionalism of the USCIS staff that reported the attempts to defraud our immigration system, and our officers who are partnering with HSI and the U.S. Attorney?s Office for the District of Connecticut to investigate these claims. I also thank our law enforcement partners for their efforts to bring perpetrators to justice. Let this serve as a reminder that if you partake in fraudulent activity, you will get caught.?

According to court documents and statements made in court, Stephenson operated Stephenson Immigration and Legal Services LLC, in Bridgeport. Between 2011 and 2017, Stephenson conspired with others to arrange 28 sham marriages between U.S. citizens and noncitizens residing in the U.S. so the non-citizens? could apply for and obtain lawful permanent residence (LPR) status, also known as getting a Green Card.

One of the 28 sham marriages was between Stephenson, who is a citizen of Jamaica, and a U.S. citizen.

For each of the other 27 fraudulent marriages, Stephenson found and introduced a U.S. citizen to be the noncitizen?s purported spouse and helped the couple obtain a marriage license. She also organized the marriage ceremony and celebration, and coached the couple on how to make their marriage appear to be genuine despite their neither living together nor otherwise intending to remain actually married.

As part of the scheme, Stephenson prepared several immigration documents needed as part of the noncitizen?s LPR application. She had the applicant and spouse sign the documents and, in many cases, mailed the documents to the USCIS immigration authorities for the applicant. In some cases, Stephenson

or her assistants prepared other false documents for the couple, such as a false lease that portrayed the couple as living together.

Stephenson typically charged between \$17,000 and \$20,000 to complete this process for a noncitizen, and the citizen spouse received between \$2,000 and \$4,000 for their participation.

During the investigation, Stephenson offered to arrange a sham marriage for a federal law enforcement agent working in an undercover capacity, and help them obtain a Green Card in exchange for a proposed fee of \$20,000. In recorded conversations, Stephenson then introduced the undercover agent to a U.S. citizen and advised them about the ways they could create the appearance that they were legally married and living together as husband and wife.

Stephenson pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit immigration marriage fraud. She faces a maximum term of imprisonment of five years when U.S. District Judge Michael P. Shea sentences her in Hartford. A sentencing date is not scheduled.

Stephenson has been released on a \$250,000 bond since her arrest on June 22, 2018.

Six other individuals involved in this scheme previously pleaded guilty.

On Dec. 5, 2018, Donovan Lawrence, of Milford, who operated Donovan's Accounting Services LLC, in Bridgeport, pleaded guilty to his role in this conspiracy. In addition, four U.S. citizens who entered into one or more fraudulent marriages with noncitizens, and one noncitizen who entered into a fraudulent marriage with a U.S. citizen, pleaded guilty. All await sentencing.

HSI and FDNS are conducting the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Henry K. Kopel is prosecuting the case.

Team Notes:

Agency:

USCIS ^[2]

Immigration Law :

Fraud/Misrepresentation ^[3]

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