

Suspended DEA Special Agent Sentenced To Four Years In Prison For Taking Bribes

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that JOHN COSTANZO JR. was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge J. Paul Oetken to four years in prison for participating in a scheme in which his co-defendant, MANUEL RECIO, and others funneled tens of thousands of dollars to COSTANZO in exchange for COSTANZO providing sensitive law enforcement information to assist defense lawyers.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: “With today’s sentence, John Costanzo Jr. finally faces the consequences of selling his office as part of a bribery scheme. By disclosing sensitive information in exchange for money, Costanzo endangered his fellow officers, interfered in significant criminal investigations, and violated the laws he had sworn to uphold. Such conduct demands serious punishment, and today’s sentence does just that. Let this be a message to all public officials who are tempted to profit illegally from their service — there will be serious consequences.”

According to the evidence presented in court during the trial:

JOHN COSTANZO JR. was a Drug Enforcement Administration (“DEA”) special agent most recently assigned to DEA Headquarters. He was a Group Supervisor in the DEA’s Miami Field Office until June 2019. MANUEL RECIO is a former DEA special agent who retired as the Assistant Special Agent in Charge for the Miami Field Office in November 2018. Upon his retirement, RECIO began operating his own business, which provided private investigative services to criminal defense attorneys and also helped defense attorneys to recruit clients. From around the time of RECIO’s retirement through around November 2019, RECIO agreed with COSTANZO to provide benefits to COSTANZO in exchange for COSTANZO providing RECIO with nonpublic information about DEA investigations. COSTANZO provided RECIO with information about nonpublic investigations, such as the identities of individuals charged and the anticipated timing of

indictments and arrests, and intelligence which COSTANZO obtained from the Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Information System ("NADDIS"), a DEA database that contains information about individuals who are or have been under investigation by the DEA. RECIO paid COSTANZO for this information, which RECIO used to help recruit new clients for criminal defense attorneys.

Among the benefits paid to COSTANZO were a \$2,500 payment made in November 2018, shortly after RECIO's retirement from the DEA, which was funneled to COSTANZO through a company owned by a close family member of COSTANZO. At the same time that this payment was made, RECIO began asking COSTANZO to run searches in NADDIS to provide RECIO with nonpublic DEA information about DEA targets and investigations. Following that initial payment, RECIO and others continued to provide benefits to COSTANZO, including tens of thousands of dollars that were funneled from RECIO through a company created by a DEA task force officer and \$50,000 that was paid to COSTANZO through a close family member for COSTANZO's purchase of a condominium in January and February 2019.

In return, COSTANZO continued to provide nonpublic DEA information to RECIO, including information about the timing of forthcoming indictments and information about DEA arrest plans of particular targets. COSTANZO also searched NADDIS for names of particular individuals requested by RECIO on dozens of occasions during the scheme and provided RECIO with information and assistance with particular charged defendants represented by attorneys for whom RECIO was working. During the scheme, COSTANZO and RECIO took steps to conceal the existence of the scheme, including by structuring the payments from RECIO to COSTANZO through third parties and through COSTANZO's use of a cellphone provided by RECIO for communications related to the scheme.

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In addition to the prison term, COSTANZO, 49, of Coral Gables, Florida, was sentenced to three years of supervised release and ordered to forfeit \$98,250.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding investigative work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice's Office of the Inspector General and thanked the DEA's Office of Professional Responsibility for its support in this matter.

The prosecution is being handled by the Office's Illicit Finance and Money Laundering Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Mathew Andrews, Emily Deininger, and Sheb Swett are in charge of the prosecution.