

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
NORTHERN DISTRICT *of* OHIO

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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of Ohio

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 23, 2015

AUSA Mark Bennett honored for prosecuting mortgage-fraud cases

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark S. Bennett was honored this week for his work prosecuting mortgage-fraud cases by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development – Office of Inspector General.

Bennett has prosecuted nearly 100 defendants involved in mortgage fraud. Northeast Ohio is recognized as one of the areas hardest hit by the mortgage-fraud crisis that swept the country in the early 2000s.

“Your efforts have truly made a difference to the public,” Nicholas Padilla, Jr., the deputy assistant Inspector General for HUD, said in presenting the award.

“Mark has been tenacious in seeking justice for the victims of mortgage fraud, and those who caused so much hardship in our city,” said U.S. Attorney Steven M. Dettelbach.

Among the cases Bennett has prosecuted:

United States v. Thomas France: France, of Strongsville, was sentenced to more than 10 years in prison and ordered to pay more than \$3 million in restitution for fraud involving six properties in Medina. France was part of a group that sold the homes at fraudulently inflated purchase prices. All the homes eventually went into foreclosure, resulting in a loss of approximately \$3.3 million.

United States v. Anthony Viola and Uri Gofman: Viola, a real estate company owner from Cleveland Heights, was sentenced to more than 12 years in prison and real estate owner Uri Gofman, of Beachwood, was sentenced to more than eight years in prison. A jury convicted Viola and Gofman of multiple counts related to the fraudulent sale of 34 homes, resulting in a loss of more than \$3 million.

United States v. Romero Minor, et. al. Minor, of Macon, Georgia, was sentenced to nearly six years in prison for fraud involving \$7.5 million and 48 properties in Mahoning and Trumbull Counties. Minor recruited straw buyers to “purchase” properties in their names. Minor represented to the straw buyers that he needed individuals like them with good credit to apply for mortgage loans on properties in their names as a way of helping other individuals in the community with bad credit who could not purchase homes in their own names. He then conspired with others to prepare and submit fraudulent mortgage loan applications to various mortgage lenders knowing that they contained false information. Minor received thousands of dollars at closing from the mortgage proceeds with the assistance of the title agents. Overall, nine people were convicted of crimes for their roles in the scheme.

Bennett, 45, joined the U.S. Attorney's Office in 2007. He previously worked for the Ohio Attorney General. He is a graduate of Baldwin Wallace College and the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and serves on the Legal Aid Society's board.

Topic(s):

Mortgage Fraud

Component(s):

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