

NEWS

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Dec. 8, 2008

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TRENTON – Former Paterson Board of Education member Chauncey I. Brown, III pleaded guilty today to attempted extortion, admitting that he accepted bribes from an insurance brokerage company in return for his official assistance in attempting to steer public contracts to the company, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

Brown, 49, pleaded guilty to a one-count criminal Information charging attempted extortion under color of official right before U.S. District Judge Anne E. Thompson. Brown is free on a \$300,000 unsecured bond pending his sentencing, which is scheduled for March 16.

Brown was arrested on Aug. 20, 2008, as part of the “Operation Broken Boards” FBI public corruption undercover investigation. On Sept. 6, 2007, eleven public officials and one private citizen were arrested in the initial phase of the investigation. To date, all but one defendant have been convicted by jury trial or have pleaded guilty.

At his plea hearing, Brown admitted that, between September 2006 and December 2006, he accepted corrupt payments totaling approximately \$13,000 in exchange for his official assistance in attempting to obtain Board of Education insurance business on behalf of an insurance brokerage company affiliated with an FBI cooperating witness.

The charge to which Brown pleaded guilty carries a maximum statutory penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. However, in determining an actual sentence, Judge Thompson will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant’s criminal history, if any, and other factors, including acceptance of responsibility. The judge, however, has wide discretion and is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all of that time.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, for the investigation involving Brown and the other defendants. He also credited prosecutors and investigators with the Atlantic County Prosecutor’s Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Theodore F.L. Housel, for their assistance in the investigation.

The case against Brown is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Gramiccioni.

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Defense counsel: Aslan Soobzokov, Esq. Paterson