

Va. Official Accused in Driver's License Fraud Probe

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Byline: Jerry Markon, Washington Post Staff Writer

Body

The manager of the **Virginia** Department of Motor Vehicles office at Springfield Mall was charged yesterday with selling **driver's licenses** to illegal immigrants and others for up to \$3,500 apiece.

The arrest of Francisco J. Martinez marked the second time in two years that a Northern **Virginia** DMV employee was **accused** of fraudulently selling **licenses** for cash. A similar scheme two years ago at the DMV office in Tysons Corner led to the guilty pleas of two employees.

Federal prosecutors in Alexandria charged Martinez, 57, of Stafford, with one count of conspiracy to commit identification **fraud**. As the head of DMV's customer service center at the mall, he supervised about 30 employees. Also charged was his wife, Miriam Martinez, 56, a former DMV clerk in Tysons Corner.

A third person charged in the scheme, Jose Daniel Guardia, 25, of Alexandria, pleaded guilty Monday. Guardia, an illegal immigrant from Bolivia, found clients and collected fees for the operation, authorities said.

Virginia licenses were issued to at least 40 people who were either illegal immigrants or whose driving privileges had been suspended, prosecutors said.

The case is the latest in a federal crackdown on document and identity **fraud** in **Virginia** since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Seven of the 19 hijackers in the attacks had fraudulently obtained **Virginia** documents.

"The integrity of our state **driver's licenses** is critical to our commerce, as well as our national security," said Paul J. McNulty, the U.**S.** attorney in Alexandria. As proof of the crackdown's success, McNulty said the cost of fraudulently obtaining a **Virginia license** has risen from \$100 a few years ago to \$3,500. A **Virginia license** usually costs \$20.

Court documents mentioned no terrorism tie in the latest case, and DMV **officials** said there is none.

Francisco and Miriam Martinez appeared briefly yesterday in U.**S.** District Court in Alexandria, and they were ordered detained until a hearing on Thursday. Lawyers had not been appointed for the couple yesterday. An attorney for Guardia, Paul Murphy, said his client is cooperating with the government and is "certainly sorry for what has happened."

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DMV spokeswoman Pam Goheen called the arrests "unfortunate and disappointing" and said the "vast majority of DMV employees are honest and hardworking." She said that Martinez had been suspended and that DMV had tracked down the estimated 40 licenses that were fraudulently issued. The licenses will be canceled.

Goheen could not explain how two similar scams might have been carried out so close together in two Northern Virginia DMV offices. But she said the agency has stepped up its enforcement and auditing efforts. Since 2002, she said, DMV "document verifiers" have double-checked every application processed by customer service staffers.

"It's two sets of eyes on every transaction," Goheen said. "There is a heightened awareness of the importance of a driver's license."

Yet court documents said the latest alleged scam was uncovered not by DMV but by the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security. After a six-month investigation that included the FBI and the DMV, officials are alleging that Francisco Martinez issued the licenses and falsified DMV records to make it appear that applicants had surrendered valid licenses from other states.

One of those fraudulently issued a license was Guardia, whose driving privileges had been suspended several times, according to court documents. The court papers said Miriam Martinez helped coordinate the scheme. If convicted, the Martinezes face up to 15 years in prison.

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