



Superior Court of California
County of Orange
News Release

Public Information Office
Contact: Gwen Vieau, 657-622-7097
PIO@occourts.org

September 7, 2016

Former Court Employee Faces Federal Charges

Santa Ana, CA – A former Orange County Superior Court employee faces federal criminal charges for altering case records, as announced today by the United States Attorney’s Office. This matter was discovered on March 20, 2015 by an Orange County Superior Court employee who noticed irregular entries while she was reviewing the court minutes in preparation for an upcoming hearing in a criminal case. She immediately reported the inaccuracies to her supervisor, and the Court immediately began an investigation to determine if other cases were affected. The Court employee, Jose Lopez, was quickly identified as the source of the questionable minutes and before the end of the day his system access was terminated. He was then placed on administrative leave pending further investigation, and shortly thereafter his employment with the Court terminated.

The Court also alerted local law enforcement about this possible criminal activity, and shortly thereafter the FBI and the Orange County District Attorney’s office contacted Court officials as part of their investigation. The Court has worked closely with the FBI by providing documentation concerning Mr. Lopez’s activities as well as expertise in reviewing the court records Mr. Lopez had allegedly modified over the last several years. This joint effort has resulted in the federal criminal charges that were announced today.

The internal investigation by Court management identified 805 infraction cases and 229 misdemeanor cases with potentially inaccurate minutes entered by this lone employee between October 2009 and March 2015. Defendants and attorneys of record in all cases were sent notices to appear in Court for hearings, which commenced on June 12, 2015. The Court scheduled the hearings to give the defendants in all of the impacted cases the opportunity to challenge the Court’s determination that the records in their cases had been inappropriately modified. In virtually every case the modifications allegedly made by Mr. Lopez were found to be inaccurate. As a result, the case records were corrected to strike the improper modifications, the judge hearing the matters re-set the cases to the position they were in prior to the modifications, and the cases proceeded normally. This process is now complete, and every affected case file has been corrected as the Court is committed to ensuring that each and every one of the case records accurately reflects the proper outcome.

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The integrity of the Court, its records, and personnel are paramount. While this incident revealed a flaw in the Court's minute entry and audit practices, the Court has spent countless hours refining its auditing practices and redesigning its software to insure that any attempt to improperly modify Court records will immediately come to the attention of a supervisor. The Court also has updated its procedures and added a number of additional safeguards to help prevent this type of activity from occurring in the future.

The Court also has a number of security requirements in place for employees in order to safeguard court records. Once a conditional job offer is made, every applicant is subject to fingerprinting. All employees are subject to background checks before they are hired. The Court receives subsequent arrest notifications from the Department of Justice during the entire course of employees' employment with the Court, and with a few limited exceptions, every employee is required to disclose any and all adult offenses, including traffic offenses.

Overview of the Superior Court of California, County of Orange:

- Provides judicial and court services for more than 3 million O.C. residents and for O.C. visitors
- Third largest trial court system in California
- Fifth largest trial court system in the U.S.A. and larger than the trial court system in 21 states
- 121 judges appointed by the governor or elected by O.C. voters (plus 3 vacant positions)
- 14 commissioners (plus 6 vacant positions)
- More than 1,500 employees
- Has jurisdiction over criminal and civil cases, which include family, probate, mental health, juvenile, and traffic cases
- About 460,000 cases are filed annually
- In 2015, 302,665 traffic/infraction cases and 54,230 misdemeanor complaints were filed
- Five justice centers, located in Santa Ana, Orange, Newport Beach, Fullerton, and Westminster

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