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Manager of Clothing Factory Found Guilty of Offering Bribe to Federal Labor Investigator in Exchange for Closing Wage Investigation

LOS ANGELES – The general manager of a La Puente garment factory has been found guilty of federal charges of offering to pay bribes to an investigator with the United States Department of Labor in exchange for the investigator closing an investigation into wage violations.

Howard Quoc Trinh, 42, of Arcadia, the manager of Seven-Bros. Enterprises, was convicted late Tuesday by a federal jury. The jury returned guilty verdicts on two counts of bribery after prosecutors presented evidence that Trinh offered to pay \$10,000 in bribe, and actually paid \$3,000 to a Department of Labor Wage and Hour investigator. As part of the bribery scheme, Trinh promised to pay the balance when the investigation was closed.

“Companies and their managers victimizing their own employees through wage violations cannot perpetuate their conduct through bribes,” said United States Attorney Eileen M. Decker. “This jury verdict strikes a blow against both corruption and the exploitation of workers.”

The Labor Department investigator was investigating Seven-Bros. for violating the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which sets standards for minimum wage and overtime pay. The Wage and Hour investigator led a team that conducted an unannounced visit to Seven-Bros on March 10, 2015. The investigation into wage violations covered a period from May 2012 through March 10, 2015, and found that Seven-Bros owed approximately \$100,000 to compensate employees for FLSA violations over that period. As part of the investigation, the Labor Department issued a “hot goods” Notice to Restrain the Shipment of Goods, which prevented the company from shipping certain inventory until the back wages were paid to employees.

The investigator returned to Seven-Bros on March 18, at which time Trinh said he did not owe his employees any back wages and that he wanted to “take care” of the investigator. In response to Trinh’s statements, the Labor Department’s Office of Investigator General (OIG) initiated an investigation and outfitted the investigator with recording equipment. On the evening of March 18, during a recorded meeting, Trinh offered the investigator \$10,000 to close out the investigation without finding any violations and to lift the Hot Goods objection.

The next day, during another recorded meeting, Trinh gave the investigator an initial payment of \$3,000 in an unmarked manila envelope. On March 20, Trinh was arrested.

Trinh was convicted late yesterday after the jury deliberated for less than one hour. As a result of today's convictions, Trinh faces a statutory maximum sentence of 30 years in federal prison. United States District Judge Christina A. Snyder, who presided over the trial, has yet to schedule a sentencing date.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Investigator General, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations.

"Today's jury verdict sends a strong message that those who attempt to bribe public officials will be held responsible for their serious crimes," stated Abel Salinas, Special Agent in Charge of the Los Angeles Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations. "The Office of Inspector General will continue to vigorously pursue those who endeavor to obstruct the Labor Department's enforcement of worker protection laws by illegal means."

Ruben Rosales, the Regional Administrator for the Labor Department's Wage and Hour Division in San Francisco, said: "We will not tolerate this type of behavior from anyone. We are very pleased that the collaboration between the Office of the Inspector General and the Division has resulted in a criminal conviction. Any employer who attempts to bribe any of our labor investigators will face consequences."