



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

FORMER MANAGER OF LONG ISLAND CATERING HALL PLEADS GUILTY
TO FORCED LABOR AND FORCED LABOR CONSPIRACY

Defendant Threatened Filipino Nationals with Deportation

Earlier today, in federal court in Central Islip, Roberto Villanueva pleaded guilty before United States Magistrate Judge Anne Y. Shields to forced labor conspiracy and forced labor of employees at the Thatched Cottage, a former catering and wedding venue in Centerport, New York. When sentenced, Villanueva faces up to 20 years in prison, as well as restitution and a fine of up to \$250,000 on each count.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; Peter C. Fitzhugh, Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), New York; Michael Mikulka, Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, New York (DOL-OIG); and Patricia A. Menges, Director, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, New York Asylum Office (USCIS), announced the guilty plea.

Villanueva formerly worked as a recruiter and manager for the Thatched Cottage. At today's plea proceeding, Villanueva admitted that workers were brought from the Philippines to the United States on H-2B visas that expired shortly after their arrival. Once their H-2B visas expired, Villanueva coached workers how to apply for student visas by fraudulently representing that they intended to attend school full-time and had sufficient resources to support themselves during school. Villanueva admitted that at times he deposited funds in the workers' bank accounts to give the appearance of ample resources, and then withdrew the funds once the student visas were approved. When workers objected to performing certain jobs, working consecutive shifts or not being paid promptly, Villanueva threatened to report them to immigration authorities. Villanueva admitted that his actions were in concert and agreement with Ralph Colamussi, the former owner of Thatched Cottage. Colamussi pleaded guilty in September 2018 to forced labor of employees and is awaiting sentencing.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Long Island Criminal Division. Assistant United States Attorney Charles P. Kelly is in charge of the prosecution, with the assistance of Assistant United States Attorney Madeline O'Connor from the Office's Long Island Civil Division.

The Defendant:

ROBERTO VILLANUEVA

Age: 64

Huntington, New York

E.D.N.Y. Criminal Docket No. 17-0592 (DRH)