

PRESS RELEASE

Former NYCHA Superintendent Convicted Of Bribery And Extortion Offenses

Thursday, October 17, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York

In the First Trial Following a 70-Person Takedown in February 2024, Joy Harris, a Former New York City Housing Authority Superintendent, Was Convicted of Bribery and Extortion for Accepting Cash from Contractors in Exchange for Awarding Contracts

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that Joy Harris, a former New York City Housing Authority (“NYCHA”) superintendent, was convicted of bribery and extortion under color of official right for soliciting and accepting tens of thousands of dollars from contractors in exchange for awarding those contractors no-bid contracts at NYCHA developments. The verdict followed a one-week trial before U.S. District Judge Lewis A. Kaplan, who will sentence HARRIS on February 26, 2025.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: “Corruption is an insidious crime—difficult to detect, corrosive in its effect on government agencies, and damaging to public trust in government institutions. Joy Harris’s years-long abuse of her position to demand tens of thousands of dollars in bribes betrayed her duty to NYCHA residents, the City of New York, and taxpayers. The jury’s unanimous verdict sends a clear message that those who use their public offices for personal gain will be held accountable.”

According to the evidence presented in court during the trial:

NYCHA is the largest public housing authority in the country, providing housing to New Yorkers across the City and receiving over \$1.5 billion in federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) every year. When repairs or construction work at NYCHA housing require the use of outside contractors, services must typically be purchased via a bidding process. However, when the value of a contract was under a certain threshold, designated staff at NYCHA developments, including assistant superintendent and superintendents, could hire a contractor of their choosing without soliciting multiple bids.

HARRIS, an assistant superintendent and superintendent at four different NYCHA developments in Manhattan between 2015 and 2021, demanded and accepted cash in exchange for NYCHA contracts. She required contractors to pay bribes up front in order to be awarded the contracts or required bribe payments after the contractor finished the work and needed a NYCHA employee to sign off on the completed job so that the contractor could be paid by NYCHA. HARRIS typically demanded 10% of the contract value—between \$500 and \$1,000, depending on the size of the contract. In total, HARRIS demanded and accepted tens of thousands of dollars in bribes in exchange for awarding contracts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

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HARRIS, 49, of Bushkill, Pennsylvania, was convicted of one count of federal program bribery, which carries a maximum term of 10 years in prison, and one count of extortion under color of official right, which carries a maximum term of 20 years in prison.

The maximum potential sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the judge.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding investigative work of the New York City Department of Investigation, U.S. Department of Homeland Security – Homeland Security Investigations (“HSI”), the HUD Office of Inspector General, and the U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, which work together collaboratively as part of the HSI Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force, as well as the special agents and task force officers of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York.

This prosecution is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (“OCDETF”) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles criminal organizations using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.

Of the 70 current and former NYCHA employees charged with bribery and extortion offenses in February 2024, 55 of the defendants have now pled guilty or been convicted at trial. The charges against the remaining defendants are pending.

This case is being handled by the Office's Public Corruption Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jerry J. Fang, Meredith Foster, Sheb Swett, Jacob R. Fiddelman, and Catherine Ghosh are in charge of the prosecution, with the assistance of Paralegal Specialists Jayda Foote and Nandita Vasantha.

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