Canadian Man Sentenced to over 11 Years in Federal Prison for Running Telemarketing Scheme that Bilked 60,000+ Victims

LOS ANGELES – The owner of a Canadian telemarketing operation – who was extradited to the United States last year after more than 10 years of litigation in Canada – was sentenced today to 135 months in federal prison for orchestrating a telemarketing scheme that falsely promised credit card fraud protection and defrauded at least 60,000 primarily elderly victims out of more than $18 million.

Mark Eldon Wilson, 57, of Vancouver, British Columbia, was sentenced by United States District Judge S. James Otero.

As he imposed the sentence, Judge Otero noted that the criminal conduct was egregious both in scope and in terms of targeting elderly victims, who suffered both financial and emotional harm resulting from the fraud.

Following a five-day trial in March, a federal jury convicted Wilson of seven counts of mail fraud and two counts of wire fraud for having orchestrated a fraudulent cross-border telemarketing scheme that targeted American victims.

The evidence at trial showed that Wilson operated the fraudulent scheme through various companies – including OPCO International Inc. and American Fraud Watch Services – and that he directed his telemarketers to mislead victims into believing they were affiliated with the victims' credit card companies. As part of the sales pitch, telemarketers falsely suggested to victims that they were vulnerable to credit card fraud and would be held liable for fraudulent charges on their cards. They sold the victims a non-existent credit card "protection" service for approximately $300 that purportedly would be in effect for 10 years, and they falsely promised a 100 percent money-back guarantee. In many instances, even when the victims did not authorize payment for these purported services, Wilson's companies charged victims' credit cards for the full amount of the "protection" service fee, even though victims were told the fee was as little as $3 per month.

In reality, Wilson and his companies were not associated with the victims' credit card companies, the credit card companies would not actually hold victims liable for charges arising from fraud, and Wilson's companies did not provide the promised credit-card-monitoring and protection services.

Between 1998 and 2001, Wilson and his telemarketers solicited over $18 million from more than 60,000 victims in 37 different states, including a number of victims in Southern California. Wilson "then converted the victims' money to his own personal use, using a portion of the fraud proceeds to fund his businesses and a portion to fund his own lavish lifestyle, including the purchase of different luxury boats, a fleet of cars used by himself and various employees of his businesses, setting up an offshore bank account in the South Pacific to house a portion of his fraud proceeds, and travelling periodically to Las Vegas to gamble and meet with other telemarketers at luxury hotels," according to court documents filed by prosecutors.

This case was jointly investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the Federal Trade Commission. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs and the Department of

Justice – Canada provided invaluable assistance to ensure Wilson was compelled to answer the charges through a lengthy extradition process.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Paul Stern of the Major Frauds section, and Assistant United States Attorneys Roger Hsieh and Joseph Woodring of the General Crimes section.