

# California Twice Convicted Felon Sentenced to Prison for Operating Fake Law Firms That Promised to Help Struggling Homeowners

An Orange County, California man was sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Santa Ana, California to serve 109 months in prison including the last 12 months in a halfway house for his role as the owner and operator of a multi-million dollar fraudulent mortgage modification scheme that posed as a successful law firm, the Justice Department announced. Bryan D'Antonio, 50, of Brea, California, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud on Aug. 9, 2016. In addition to the term of prison imposed by U.S. District Judge David O. Carter, Judge Carter ordered D'Antonio to pay \$3,826,977.95 in restitution.

D'Antonio admitted that, between October 2008 and June 2009, he participated in a scheme with Ronald Rodis, Charles Wayne Farris, and others to induce homeowners to pay between \$3,500 and \$5,500 for the services of Rodis Law Group (RLG) and its successor entity, America's Law Group (ALG). RLG and ALG advertised on radio stations nationwide, urging struggling homeowners to call a toll-free number and stating that the companies consisted of "a team of experienced attorneys" who were "highly skilled in negotiating lower interest rates and even lowering your principal balance." In fact, RLG and ALG were telemarketing operations that never had teams of experienced attorneys, and that collected these payments from distressed homeowners, without providing anything of value to the overwhelming majority of them.

During much of the scheme, Ronald Rodis was the only attorney at RLG. "This defendant – a repeat telemarketing fraudster - took advantage of vulnerable homeowners facing foreclosure during the mortgage crisis," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Chad A. Readler of the Justice Department's Civil Division. "His two fake law firms promised homeowners assistance saving their homes and modifying their mortgages. The sad reality is both firms were nothing more than telemarketing scams." "While still under court supervision after serving a prison term in another telemarketing case, D'Antonio oversaw what was essentially a boiler room operation that preyed upon struggling homeowners," said Acting U.S. Attorney Sandra R. Brown. "Hundreds of victims lost millions of dollars after D'Antonio's employees told a series of lies that misrepresented nearly every aspect of the business.

Today's lengthy sentence will ensure that he will not have the opportunity to defraud unsuspecting victims for many years." D'Antonio was previously convicted of mail and wire fraud and sentenced to four years in federal prison for his

participation in a medical billing scheme. He was also subject to a permanent injunction prohibiting him from having any involvement with any business that engaged in telemarketing or misrepresented the services it would provide. D'Antonio admitted that he started RLG while he was still on supervised release from his prior conviction. In violation of D'Antonio's permanent injunction, RLG and ALG sold their services through an extensive telemarketing operation in which employees routinely misrepresented the services RLG and ALG would provide.

RLG and ALG telemarketers working for D'Antonio made numerous misrepresentations regarding the companies' ability to negotiate loan modifications for homeowners. For example, the telemarketers stated that RLG and ALG had been in business for 11 years when in fact the company had only opened in October 2008. They falsely stated that RLG and ALG routinely obtained positive results for homeowners, including lower monthly payments, reductions in principal balance and lower interest rates. In fact, positive results were rarely achieved for any RLG or ALG clients. Telemarketers also falsely reiterated that homeowners would have a team of attorneys and real estate professionals assigned to their case.

The telemarketers did not disclose to homeowners that RLG and ALG were owned and operated by Bryan D'Antonio, a convicted felon who was prohibited from engaging in telemarketing. In connection with his guilty plea, D'Antonio admitted that the RLG and ALG schemes fraudulently obtained approximately \$9 million from more than 1,500 victims. "Mr. D'Antonio preyed upon victims who were already experiencing difficult circumstances and robbed them of their remaining financial resources," said Assistant Director in Charge Deirdre L. Fike of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office. "Homeowners seeking financial assistance should thoroughly investigate businesses before investing their money in advance of receiving services." D'Antonio's co-defendants, Charles Wayne Farris and Ronald Rodis, both previously pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud. Farris and Rodis are scheduled to be sentenced on May 1.

This case was investigated by the FBI and is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney John W. Burke of the Civil Division's Consumer Protection Branch and Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph T. McNally of the Central District of California. For more information about the Consumer Protection Branch, visit its website at <http://www.justice.gov/civil/consumer-protection-branch>. For more information about the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California, visit its website at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca>.