

## Court Employee and Lawyer in New York Face Charges for Exchanging Client Referrals for Money



A federal court employee and a private defense lawyer in New York face charges for exchanging criminal defendants' referrals for bribes. According to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan, Dionisio Figueroa, a Southern District of New York court clerk, referred at least 45 criminal defendants to Telesforo Del Valle Jr. for possible representation in pending cases. In return, Del Valle paid Figueroa tens of thousands of dollars in referral payments in cash.

Figueroa's responsibilities as a clerk included criminal case intake and record-keeping. He allegedly encouraged criminal defendants, who had free court-appointed lawyers, to switch counsel and hire Del Valle instead. Figueroa vouched for Del Valle when speaking with defendants or their families as they appeared in court, giving them the lawyer's business card or calling Del Valle's office to make the connection.

Prosecutors said Del Valle gave Figueroa referral payments totaling "at least tens of thousands of dollars" in cash. Court rules prohibit clerks from taking outside work that would pose a conflict of interest, while Del Valle was subject to ethical rules governing lawyer conduct.

The men were each charged with conspiracy to bribe a federal employee and pay illegal compensation to a judicial employee, bribery of a federal employee, and illegal compensation to a judicial employee. They were also charged with lying to federal law enforcement agents during the investigation. Figueroa denied making referrals except on four occasions for friends or close relations and denied getting paid. Del Valle denied having records of referrals or payments.

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According to the indictment, Figueroa referred at least 20 criminal defendants to Del Valle, who retained his services. Prosecutors said the alleged scheme lasted from 2011 to 2022.

The case is a stark example of how public officials and private citizens can use their positions of power to engage in corrupt behavior. Figueroa and Del Valle allegedly took advantage of vulnerable criminal defendants who rely on the justice system for fair treatment and representation.

The charges against Figueroa and Del Valle carry serious consequences. If convicted, they could face fines, imprisonment, and disbarment. Their alleged actions have undermined public trust in the justice system and highlighted the need for greater transparency and accountability in legal proceedings.

In response to the charges, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan issued a statement emphasizing the importance of upholding the rule of law and combating corruption. "When public officials and private citizens engage in corrupt practices, they erode the integrity of our justice system and betray the public trust," the statement read. "We will continue to work tirelessly to hold accountable those who seek to profit from their positions of power and to ensure that justice is served for all."

The case is ongoing, and both Figueroa and Del Valle are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. However, the charges against them remind them that corruption can occur at all levels of society and that those who engage in unethical behavior will be held accountable for their actions. The justice system depends on the integrity of those who serve it, and any breach of that integrity must be swiftly and effectively addressed to ensure that justice is served for all.