

Four-Year Sentence Handed to Attorney Responsible for Numerous Bogus Disability Lawsuits



A Florida lawyer has been handed a four-year prison sentence for orchestrating a series of fraudulent disability lawsuits using stolen identities. The case, which unfolded in New York, revealed a complex web of deception involving nearly 300 lawsuits filed on behalf of purported plaintiffs who claimed they could not access public establishments due to non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, it was uncovered that the plaintiffs had never engaged the lawyer's services nor had they visited the establishments in question.

The verdict was delivered by U.S. District Judge Paul Gardephe in Manhattan, who also mandated a \$200,000 fine along with the forfeiture of more than \$640,000 from the defendant, 68-year-old Stuart Finkelstein. Prosecutors detailed how Finkelstein exploited the ADA regulations, filing lawsuits against various businesses in Florida and New York under false pretenses. The fraudulent scheme enabled Finkelstein to amass over \$600,000 for himself, causing substantial financial losses, surpassing \$1.5 million, for the targeted businesses.

According to statements from Manhattan U.S. Attorney Damian Williams, "Finkelstein has now been held accountable and is facing prison time for his brazen scheme." The case not only underscores the importance of maintaining the integrity of legal actions but also serves as a cautionary tale for businesses that have been unwittingly ensnared in such malicious activities.

Reportedly, Finkelstein frequently targeted small businesses, earning him the moniker of a "mom-and-pop shop" litigator. An example highlighted by The New York Post in 2019 involved a Brooklyn laundromat owner who recounted Finkelstein's threat that he could lose his property unless he settled the ADA lawsuit that Finkelstein had filed against him.

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The legal proceedings initially began with Finkelstein pleading not guilty to a range of charges, including mail fraud, aggravated identity theft, and obstruction of justice. However, in a dramatic twist, he changed his plea in July 2022, admitting to one count of mail fraud. This strategic maneuver paved the way for a more streamlined legal process, ultimately leading to his sentencing.

It is worth noting that Finkelstein's legal career has not been devoid of controversy. He was disbarred in New York in 2007 following allegations of misconduct that prompted his resignation. Despite this setback, his New York law license was reinstated in 2016, a decision that now raises questions about the legal system's ability to effectively monitor and regulate attorneys with prior disciplinary actions.

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This case serves as a stark reminder of the potential ramifications of fraudulent legal activities and the importance of safeguarding the integrity of the legal system. As businesses continue to navigate the complexities of compliance with ADA regulations, they must also be vigilant against opportunistic individuals seeking personal gain through deceptive lawsuits. Finkelstein's sentencing reinforces the commitment of the legal authorities to maintain justice and accountability within the legal landscape, underscoring the severe consequences awaiting those who engage in fraudulent and exploitative activities.

Ultimately, this verdict highlights the collaborative efforts of legal professionals, investigators, and the judicial system to uphold the principles of justice and ensure that individuals who abuse the legal process are held liable for their actions. The case of Stuart Finkelstein serves as a testament to the resilience of the legal system in the face of deceptive schemes and reaffirms its commitment to protecting the rights and interests of businesses and individuals alike.

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