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Local bail bonds owner faces kidnapping, extortion charges

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September 16, 2011

A Modesto bail bondsman, his employee and one other individual were arrested Wednesday on a litany of criminal charges, including allegations they kidnapped individuals for the purpose of extortion.

Aleo John Pontillo II, 40, the owner of AJ's Bail Bonds in Modesto, was taken into custody along with his bail agent Janelle Llorens, 27, and Mark David Davis, 49, by the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department after an arrest warrant was filed by the California Department of Insurance. It is not known if Davis is an employee of the bail company.

Pontillo and Llorens are charged with conspiracy to kidnap for the purpose of extortion, conspiracy to commit grand theft and insurance fraud. Llorens also was charged with perjury. Davis is charged with conspiracy to commit grand theft, insurance fraud, and perjury.

"The arrests of these unscrupulous licensed bail agents should send a very clear message," said Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones. "The severity of their alleged crimes will simply not be tolerated."

The criminal complaint, which covers events between 2006 to 2010, alleges Pontillo and Llorens took at least six individuals from their home or the courthouse and forcibly held them at AJ's Bail Bonds until they gave them more money. In some of the cases the individuals said they were handcuffed to poles or weight benches in a darkened basement for up to six hours, according to the criminal complaint.

The individuals were told they would be taken back to jail if they didn't raise more money, according to Jon Reineccius, the investigator for the Department of Insurance who filed the criminal complaint.

One woman told the investigator she was taken to AJ's Bail Bonds with her boyfriend and threatened with a Taser and told she could not leave, even though she had no bail bond with the company.

"This criminal conspiracy abused those who had already paid a premium bond for their release from jail," said Commissioner Jones. "To have them snatched from the street and extorted for additional funds or face the threat of return to jail is abhorrent."

The criminal complaint also alleges Pontillo and Llorens were committing grand theft by filing false motions to set aside bail forfeitures. The criminal complaint alleges that motions were filed with the court to set aside forfeitures because the company claimed they never received proper notice from the court. However in some of the cases the investigators said they found the letters from the court in the clients' files.

The California Department of Insurance accuses AJ's Bail Bonds of defrauding Stanislaus County out of at least \$450,000 through the scheme and committing perjury to keep it going.

The insurance fraud charge stems from an allegation that the company submitted insurance claims for bail forfeitures with information known to be false.

The trio was arraigned Thursday in Stanislaus County District Court and all three pled not guilty. The sheriff's department in custody report lists all three in jail, as of Friday afternoon. Pontillo is being held on a \$1.5 million bail. Llorens has a \$1 million bail, and Davis has a \$300,000 bail.

AJ's Bail Bond was the target of a federal-led task force raid in December 2008. Investigators searched the AJ's Bail Bonds office and Pontillo's home. No arrests were made at the time and an FBI spokesman said the investigation was ongoing.

The investigation leading to Wednesday's arrests was a joint cooperative effort between CDI's Investigations Division, the FBI, and the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department. The Stanislaus County District Attorney's Office is prosecuting the case.

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