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United States Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner Eastern District Of California

Last Defendant Pleads Guilty In Bakersfield Debt Collection Scheme

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FRESNO, Calif. — United States Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner announced that Paul Anthony Vasquez, 27, of Santa Clarita, pleaded guilty today to conspiring to commit mail and wire fraud and money laundering. Vasquez also agreed to pay full restitution and forfeit assets seized by federal agents, including over \$950,000 in cash and a 1.5 carat diamond ring.

According to the plea agreement, Vasquez was the principal operator of Maxwell, Turner and Associates Inc. (MTA) in Bakersfield. MTA claimed to provide debt collection services. After a client signed a contract, MTA would provide them with false information about legal proceedings, the whereabouts of the debtor, the ability to collect the funds, and the need for additional fees. When MTA collected money from the debtor, they would not send the money to their clients. Once the client stopped sending money to MTA, they would stop communication with the client. Vasquez admitted in the plea agreement that the losses to victims of this scheme were more than \$1 million.

Vasquez is the third defendant to plead guilty to this scheme. On November 28, 2011, Dariann Jeffrey Summers, 41, of Taft, and Stefan Lemar Miller, 32, of Santa Clarita, were sentenced by United States District Judge Anthony W. Ishii for charges related to the MTA scheme. Summers was sentenced to eight years in prison and Miller was sentenced to six years and nine months in prison.

This case is the product of an extensive investigation by the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation, the Bakersfield Police Department, and the Kern County District Attorney's Office. Assistant United States Attorneys Mark J. McKeon and Stanley A. Boone are prosecuting the case.

Vasquez is scheduled to be sentenced on April 30, 2012 by United States District Judge Anthony W. Ishii. The maximum statutory penalty for conspiring to commit mail and wire fraud is 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The maximum statutory penalty for money laundering is 10 years in prison, and a fine of twice the value of the property involved in the money laundering transaction. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of any applicable statutory factors and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables.

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