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Federal search warrants targets Irvine loan modification firm

March 11, 2010 | By SEAN EMERY

IRVINE – A half-dozen federal and local agencies conducted a raid on the United Law Group's Irvine offices on Thursday, as law enforcement officials carried out a federal search warrant tied to a loan modification fraud investigation.

The U.S. Postal Inspection service led the raid on the embattled loan modification firm, along with officials from the FBI, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, the Orange County District Attorney's office, the Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program and officers from the Newport Beach and Irvine Police Departments, Postal Inspector Renee Focht said.

The raid began at 8 a.m., with officials shutting the office at 2525 Campus Drive as they carried out the search, Focht said. No arrests were reported.

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The raid was part of an ongoing federal investigation involving possible loan modification fraud, FBI Spokeswoman Laura Eimiller said.

Investigators in their affidavit for a search warrant allege that the United Law Group is a company "permeated by fraud." Interviews with clients and former employees indicated that the company collects upfront fees of between \$1,500 and \$12,000 as a retainer before work begins, although investigators say they were unaware of any cases where the company completed a successful loan modification, beyond the ones cited in their advertising campaign, according to the affidavit.

United Law Group was already facing scrutiny from the California State Bar.

The state bar in July filed a notice of disciplinary charges against Sean Rutledge, an attorney with the United Law Group, accusing him of taking \$1,750 from a homeowner in November 2008 but never making an effort to get his loan modified.

The state bar filing alleged that it took the client months to get their money back, and that they were forced to sign a document releasing Rutledge from all legal liabilities. Rutledge in a statement released after the charges were made public declined to comment on anything related to a former client.

Contact the writer: 714-796-7939 or semery@ocregister.com

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