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Zinna gets sentence

Ex-lawyer must also pay \$1.5 million

Bill Lodge
Advocate staff writer
November 04, 2011

1 COMMENTS

Disbarred Baton Rouge lawyer Randy P. Zinna was sentenced Thursday to 30 months in federal prison after admitting he defrauded government pension funds, an 83-year-old widow and others of more than \$1.5 million.

U.S. District Judge James J. Brady announced the sentence after Assistant U.S. Attorney M. Patricia Jones said Zinna identified other people "who may have committed crimes."

Jones said prosecutors and officials of the FBI and Louisiana Inspector General's Office recognize "his assistance as substantial."

Zinna, 54, promised in his plea agreement last year to pay restitution of \$434,164 to the Municipal Police Employees' Retirement System of Louisiana and \$340,392 to the East Baton Rouge City-Parish Employees' Retirement System.

During his law career, Zinna served for years as counsel to both pension funds.

The largest swindle in Zinna's case was \$546,351 taken from an 83-year-old widow identified only as "M.M."

He has admitted that much of the stolen money was used to pay off his gambling debts.

"I am so sorry," Zinna told Brady.

He said he wants "to remedy the harm that I've caused."

One of Zinna's attorneys, E.J. Hurst II, conceded that Zinna's crime, mail fraud, was significant.

But Hurst added that Zinna already has suffered significant punishment from the permanent loss of his law license. Hurst asked that Zinna

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receive the least prison time possible so that he can begin paying restitution to his victims.

Jones, however, said any prison sentence less than 30 months would “minimize the offense.”

Mail fraud is a federal felony that carries a possible prison term of 20 years.

But Zinna’s sentencing guidelines were lowered significantly by the fact that he had no prior felony convictions.

Victims’ pain, however, was recognized by the judge.

Brady told Zinna he had received dozens of letters about his case. Most of those letters, Brady said, “were unfavorable to you.”

Zinna said any letter writers with retirement money in the two municipal funds have not lost any of their current or future pension payments.

But Addis Police Chief Ricky Anderson disagreed.

“Mr. Zinna says this has not affected us individually,” Anderson told Brady.

“It has.”

Anderson said the West Baton Rouge Parish town must pay an additional three percent to maintain its pension plan.

“It’s affecting the employees’ raises,” Anderson said.

“The retirement systems themselves have lost a substantial amount of money,” Jones noted.

Zinna argued that police and other municipal pensions were affected much more by the economic meltdown of 2008 than his fraudulent actions.

And Zinna told Brady his malpractice insurance should provide “substantial monies ... toward restitution at some point.”

Did his guilty plea ensure that? Brady asked.

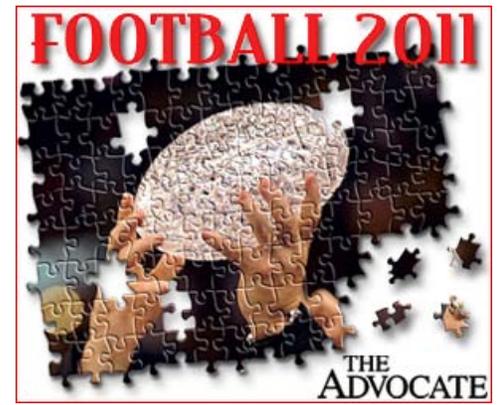
Zinna said his insurer would determine whether that is the case.

Brady chose to keep the prison term within federal sentencing guidelines.

The judge also ordered full restitution and said Zinna must serve two years of post-prison supervision by federal investigators.

“This (30-month prison term) will send the proper message to the community: Activity of this sort will not be tolerated,” Brady said. “I hope you understand that.”

Brady ordered Zinna to report to federal prison on Dec. 19.



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