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Media Inquiries: 202-927-8940

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TWO FLORIDA MEN CONVICTED OF DEFRAUDING HOMEOWNERS IN HOME LOAN MODIFICATION SCAM

Scam Falsely Promised HAMP Mortgage Modifications in Exchange for Upfront Fees

WASHINGTON, DC - Christy Romero, Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (SIGTARP), and Carmen M. Ortiz, United States Attorney for the District of Massachusetts, today announced that on Thursday, two Florida men were convicted of defrauding homeowners in Massachusetts and elsewhere in a home loan modification scam. Christopher S. Godfrey, 44, of Delray Beach, Fla., and Dennis Fischer, 42, of Highland Beach, Fla., were convicted of conspiracy, wire fraud, mail fraud, and misuse of a government seal.

From January 2009 through May 2011, Godfrey, Fischer, and their employees, operating under the name Home Owners Protection Economics, Inc. (HOPE), made a series of misrepresentations to induce struggling homeowners looking for a federally-funded home loan modification to pay HOPE a \$400-\$900 upfront fee in exchange for HOPE's help obtaining modifications. Among these misrepresentations were the claims that, with HOPE's assistance, the homeowner was guaranteed to receive a loan modification under the Home Affordable Modification Program (HAMP), which is part of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) and is a federally-funded mortgage assistance program. HOPE also claimed that it operated as a non-profit. In exchange for these up-front fees, HOPE sent its customers, including homeowners in Massachusetts, a "do-it-yourself" application package, which was virtually identical to the application that the government provides free of charge. The HOPE customers had no advantage in the application process, and, in fact, most of their applications were denied. Through these misrepresentations, HOPE was able to persuade thousands of homeowners to pay more than \$4 million in fees.

"While our nation was mired in the housing crisis, Godfrey and Fischer ripped-off thousands of struggling homeowners to the tune of more than \$4 million," said Christy Romero, Special Inspector General for TARP (SIGTARP). "Godfrey and Fischer falsely advertised and guaranteed homeowners mortgage modifications through HAMP, the federal government's TARP-funded housing support program. They promised homeowners, in exchange for upfront fees of up to \$900, successful HAMP mortgage loan modifications. Instead, Godfrey and Fischer did little if any work on homeowners' behalf and simply mailed them paperwork virtually identical to freely available HAMP applications, instructing homeowners to submit the applications on their own. Applying for a HAMP modification is free, and free federal mortgage counseling is available. SIGTARP and our law enforcement partners will not tolerate fraud related to TARP, and those guilty of utter disregard for the law and common decency will be brought to justice and held accountable for their crimes."

Sentencing is scheduled for February 13, 2014. The defendants face a maximum sentence on each count of 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release, a \$250,000 fine, and restitution.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Adam Bookbinder of Ortiz's Computer Crimes Unit and Trial Attorney Mona Sedky of the U.S. Department of Justice's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section, Criminal Division.

This prosecution was brought in coordination with President Barack Obama's Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force, which was established to wage an aggressive and coordinated effort to investigate and prosecute financial crimes. SIGTARP is a member of the task force. To learn more about the President's Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force, please visit www.StopFraud.gov.

About SIGTARP

The Office of the Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program investigates fraud, waste, and abuse in connection with TARP.

To report suspected illicit activity involving TARP, dial the **SIGTARP Hotline**: 1-877-SIG-2009 (1-877-744-2009).

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