



SIGTARP

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL
FOR THE TROUBLED ASSET RELIEF PROGRAM

ADVANCING ECONOMIC STABILITY THROUGH TRANSPARENCY, COORDINATED OVERSIGHT AND ROBUST ENFORCEMENT

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CONNECTICUT WOMAN WHO RAN \$2 MILLION PONZI SCHEME SENTENCED TO EIGHT YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON FOR INVESTOR FRAUD

WASHINGTON, DC - The Office of the Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (SIGTARP) and the United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut David B. Fein today announced that Robin Bruhjell Brass, 55, of Washington Depot, Connecticut, was sentenced on Friday by United States District Judge Robert N. Chatigny in Hartford to 96 months of imprisonment (an upward departure over the advisory Sentencing Guidelines range), followed by three years of supervised release, for operating a long-running Ponzi scheme that defrauded investors of approximately \$2 million. Brass has been detained since her arrest on November 15, 2011.

“Brass targeted her Ponzi scheme at elderly or ailing, hardworking citizens down on their luck,” said Christy Romero, Special Inspector General at SIGTARP. “This included a victim of a serious car accident, a 75 year old mother grieving for her daughter, and a couple who lost its nest egg in the financial crisis. Brass threatened her victims and correctly predicted that she would go to jail. She can spend the next eight years thinking about how she stole their money, diverted it through a TARP bank, and used it to fund her lifestyle. SIGTARP and our law enforcement partners stand ready to uncover TARP-related fraud and will continue to protect taxpayers and ensure accountability for all Americans.”

“This defendant preyed upon the elderly and other vulnerable people, deceived them into believing their investments with her were safe, insured, and guaranteed, and then stole almost two million dollars of their hard-earned savings,” stated U.S. Attorney Fein. “Hopefully, this lengthy sentence will serve as a warning to all would-be fraudsters and a reminder to the investing public to be vigilant before entrusting their life savings to so-called investment advisors. You should research your investment advisors and verify the information you are provided. I commend Connecticut's Department of Banking for initiating this investigation, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, SIGTARP, and FBI for pursuing it thoroughly to secure justice. I applaud the victims who appeared in court for sentencing and told the Court about the fraud and the painful ways in which it has affected their lives.”

According to court documents and statements made in court, Brass represented herself as a successful investment advisor and solicited funds from investors, including investors who were elderly and in a vulnerable physical condition. Brass told some potential investors that their money would be safe if invested with her because she had a formula for investing that ensured against loss and guaranteed a good return on investment. She also told some investors that her investment funds were federally insured and that she would personally guarantee investments in the fund with her own substantial personal assets. As part of the scheme, Brass reassured some of her investors by sending fraudulent account statements to them purporting to represent their account balances and that their investments

were performing well. Brass told some investors that she could not repay them because the State of Connecticut had "frozen" her accounts. These statements were false.

Brass failed to invest all of the funds entrusted with her and used some of the money to pay personal expenses for herself and her family, such as credit card bills, college tuition bills, home furnishings, and clothing, and to make "lulling" payments to previous investors. Brass also used investors' money to make loan payments to a bank that received funds through the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP).

The investigation revealed that Brass operated this Ponzi scheme and defrauded individuals, many of them elderly, of at least \$1.9 million over seven years. At sentencing on Friday, the court found that Brass abused her victims' trust and that Brass obstructed justice by trying to silence her victims by telling them that their funds were "frozen" and that if they came forward they might never see their money.

Six victims spoke at Friday's sentencing. One victim told the Court that she was recovering from a near-catastrophic car accident when Brass approached her about investing her insurance settlement money with her. Brass took the insurance proceeds from the victim on the day they were received and diverted them to her own use. As a result, the victim, who is battling cancer, told the Court that she has been forced to forego physical therapy and other recommended medical treatments that she now cannot afford. Another victim, now 92 years old, told the Court that Brass stole more than \$600,000 of her money over the course of seven years, some of it taken when Brass already knew that she was the subject of state and federal investigations.

A hearing to determine restitution will be scheduled.

On April 25, 2012, Brass pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud.

This matter was investigated by SIGTARP, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the State of Connecticut Department of Banking. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Susan L. Wines.

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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