

NEWS RELEASE



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FINANCIAL INVESTIGATION REVEALS WARREN TOWNSHIP MAN CONDUCTED FRAUDULANT CHARITABLE SCHEME IN MONMOUTH COUNTY

On May 19, 2010, Christopher Elia, 44, of Warren Township, N.J., was arrested by Detectives from the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office with the assistance of the Warren Township Police Department on complaints charging him with first degree Financial Facilitation of Criminal Activity, second degree Theft by Deception, second degree Misconduct by a Corporate Official, fourth degree Falsifying Records and second degree Conspiracy to commit those crimes. The charges follow an investigation into Elia's finances which was conducted by the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office.

The investigation revealed that Elia sought and collected charitable financial contributions from a large number of donors, primarily small businesses, using a variety of names of purported charities. Many of the donors are from Monmouth County. Elia used the names of actual charities, as well as names which were similar to legitimate charitable organizations, in his efforts to collect the contributions. The names of the fictitious organizations which Elia represented that he was collecting charitable contributions on behalf of include the American Veterans Relief Foundation, the Disabled Firefighters Fund, the National Police Officer's Bulletin, and the Police and Sheriff's Crime Report.

Additionally, the investigation revealed that Elia used high pressure tactics and misleading information to solicit contributions from business owners over the telephone. Elia used "runners" to pick up contributions directly from donors. The donors were given the impression by Elia and his associates that their respective contributions would be used to support local fire, police or disabled veterans organizations. Elia also frequently provided donors with stickers bearing simulated symbols of legitimate law enforcement agencies and firefighter organizations. The investigation further revealed that Elia altered logos and receipts used by legitimate organizations for his own use.

The investigation determined that Elia collected charitable contributions totaling in excess of approximately \$596,000 in this manner. However, Elia did not transfer the funds which he collected in this manner to any legitimate charities, and instead used the funds which he collected from the charitable donors to pay his own personal expenses, to include without limitation extensive gambling debts.

The complaints allege that Elia committed the crime of Financial Facilitation of Criminal Activity (commonly referred to as “Money Laundering”) with respect to more than \$500,000. Thus far the investigation, which is ongoing, has determined that Elia used deception to steal at least that aggregate sum from his many victims.

Monmouth County Superior Court Judge Thomas F. Scully set bail for Elia at \$1,000,000 “cash only.”

Monmouth County Prosecutor Luis A. Valentin stated, “This arrest is an important step towards ensuring the sustainability of legitimate charities doing good works throughout Monmouth County. The investigation revealed both the best and worst in our community. While hundreds of hard working people were willing to give of their hard earned money, one man was able to divert hundreds of thousands of those dollars away from deserving charities into his own hands.”

Notwithstanding this arrest, the investigation into Elia’s criminal activities is ongoing. Members of the public possessing information regarding any criminal activity on the part of Elia or any of his associates are encouraged to contact Captain Brian Rubino of the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office at 1-800/ 848-0668. A recent photograph of Elia is attached to this News Release in order to assist members of the public in ascertaining whether they possess relevant information.

Upon conviction, the maximum potential custodial sentence for a first degree crime is a State Prison term of up to 20 years, the maximum potential custodial sentence for a second degree crime is a State Prison term of up to 10 years, and the maximum potential custodial sentence for a fourth degree crime is a term of up to 18 months.

Despite these charges, every defendant is presumed innocent, unless and until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, following a trial at which the defendant has all of the trial rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and State law.

The case is assigned to Assistant Monmouth County Prosecutor Christopher Matthews. Defense counsel has not yet entered an appearance with the Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office on Elia’s behalf in connection with these charges.

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