

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Irish National Sentenced in Multi-State Home Repair Fraud Scheme**

Tuesday, April 7, 2026

**For Immediate Release**

District of Rhode Island

PROVIDENCE – An Irish national who was living unlawfully in the United States was sentenced today in federal court in Rhode Island for his role in a scheme to defraud homeowners in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, announced United States Attorney Charles C. Calenda.

John O'Brien, 28, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Chief Judge John J. McConnell, Jr. to 56 months in federal prison. He is expected to be deported following the completion of his sentence. O'Brien pleaded guilty on December 11, 2025, to wire fraud.

"John O'Brien's scheme was not just fraudulent, it was predatory. He deliberately targeted homeowners and exploited their trust for personal and financial gain," said United States Attorney Calenda. "This case reflects a broader pattern of individuals known as 'Traveling Conmen' who cross state lines for the purpose of defrauding victims. Individuals who engage in this kind of calculated deception should expect to be aggressively investigated and prosecuted in federal court. This office will continue to prioritize protecting individuals from this type of premeditated scheme. Today's sentence reflects the seriousness of O'Brien's conduct and the harm it causes to victims"

"O'Brien preyed on unsuspecting homeowners in Rhode Island and Massachusetts by posing as a skilled tradesman and contractor—someone they could trust. Instead, this conman fleeced homeowners of upwards of \$1 million while inflicting substantial damage to their homes. In one case, O'Brien, an illegal immigrant from Ireland, used his origin to build rapport with an elderly veteran in Warwick, Rhode Island over their shared Irish heritage only to extort him for tens of thousands of dollars in unnecessary home repairs," said Homeland Security Investigations New England Acting Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Grimming. "These scammers actively manipulate homeowners' emotions, and anyone can be a victim. We urge homeowners to be wary of anyone offering unsolicited services and, most importantly, to come forward if they've been

victimized. After today's sentence, O'Brien will serve serious federal prison time and be subsequently deported."

Colonel Michael Lima of the Warwick Police Department stated, "This case is a direct result of the exceptional work of our detectives and the strong partnerships we've built with our local, state, and federal law enforcement colleagues. Their persistence, attention to detail, and commitment to protecting our community ensured that a sophisticated and predatory scheme was thoroughly investigated and brought to justice."

As outlined in court documents, O'Brien and his co-conspirators induced homeowners to pay for home repairs that were unnecessary and often not completed. O'Brien falsely claimed structural problems, overstated repair needs, and misrepresented the necessity of services, as well as the qualifications of his purported construction companies, including Traditional Masonry & Construction.

In some instances, O'Brien initially performed or recommended minor repairs before falsely claiming that additional, more extensive work was urgently needed, significantly increasing the cost to homeowners.

O'Brien's fraud scheme came to the attention of law enforcement when an 83-year-old Warwick resident, identified in court documents as Victim 1, contacted the Warwick Police Department to report that he had been defrauded by a contractor. Victim 1 reported that O'Brien told him that, while doing work in the neighborhood, he observed cracks in Victim 1's foundation.

O'Brien offered to repair the damage to the foundation and collected \$9,500 from Victim 1. As work proceeded, O'Brien claimed that further damage was discovered. O'Brien revised the costs for repairs and sought an additional \$80,000 from the victim. A home inspector hired by the United States Attorney's Office later reviewed the property and found no evidence of a need for these extensive foundation repairs.

At the change of plea hearing on December 11, 2025, O'Brien admitted to defrauding property owners of over \$1.5 million between July 2021 and March 2025.

The scheme O'Brien executed is becoming increasingly common throughout the United States. According to the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, the Traveling Conmen Fraud Group has been recognized as a Transnational Organized Crime group. Members are typically groups of Irish or U.K. nationals who entered the United States on pleasure or tourist visas and overstayed their visits or, more commonly, entered the United States illegally.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Taylor A. Dean and Sandra R. Hebert.

The matter was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations and the Warwick and East Providence Police Departments.

This case is part of the Homeland Security Task Force (HSTF) initiative established by Executive Order 14159, Protecting the American People Against Invasion. The HSTF is a whole-of-government partnership dedicated to eliminating criminal cartels, foreign gangs, transnational criminal organizations, and human smuggling and trafficking rings operating in the United States and abroad. Through historic interagency collaboration, the HSTF directs the full might of United States law enforcement towards identifying, investigating, and prosecuting the full spectrum of crimes committed by these organizations, which have long fueled violence and instability within our borders. In performing this work, the HSTF places special emphasis on investigating and prosecuting those engaged in child trafficking or other crimes involving children. The HSTF further utilizes all available tools to prosecute and remove the most violent criminal aliens from the United States. HSTF Rhode Island comprises agents and officers from Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Drug Enforcement Administration, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, U.S. Marshals Service, ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, Naval Criminal Investigative Service, U.S. Department of Labor-Office of Inspector General, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security-Intelligence & Analysis, and Rhode Island Police Departments in Warwick, Newport, Providence, East Providence, and Lincoln, with the prosecution being led by the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Rhode Island.

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