

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Northern District of Georgia

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Jury convicts operator of National Vocation Group job-staffing company of wire fraud

ATLANTA – A federal jury in Atlanta has convicted Erick Powell, a former operator and co-owner of the National Vocation Group job-staffing company, of wire fraud. A second defendant and co-owner, Ahmad McCormick, pleaded guilty to wire fraud on August 31, 2017.

“Powell and his co-defendant used their company to dupe hundreds of job-seekers into paying high fees for unnecessary training with the expectation of placement in jobs that did not exist,” said U.S. Attorney Byung J. “BJay” Pak. “The jury’s verdict is a strong message to other criminals that law enforcement will find and prosecute any person or company seeking to take advantage of the hard-working citizens of this district.”

“Erick Powell deceived victims into believing they were applying for legitimate jobs that required certain Occupational Safety and Health Administration certifications when, in fact, they were not. Powell and his co-conspirators used phony online job postings to lure unsuspecting applicants into fraudulently paying their company for unnecessary OSHA training certifications. We will continue to work with OSHA and our law enforcement partners to investigate those who prey on legitimate job seekers,” stated Rafiq Ahmad, Special Agent in Charge, Atlanta Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

According to U.S. Attorney Pak, the charges, and other information presented in court: Powell and Ahmad McCormick operated a fraudulent job-staffing company in Atlanta called National Vocation Group (NVG) from August 2015 through October 2015. Powell and McCormick used Indeed.com and ZipRecruiter.com to advertise open and available jobs in the housekeeping and maintenance industries that paid above-average wages. These advertisements falsely represented that NVG had existing contracts with commercial cleaning companies throughout the Atlanta area; that the jobs paid above-average wages of up to \$17/hour; and that NVG could place its clients in these high-paying jobs.

When NVG’s job applicant clients were interviewed by Powell, McCormick, and other employees of NVG, the applicants were told that, to be hired for the advertised jobs, they would have to pay \$349 for certain OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) training. The applicants were falsely told that federal law required housecleaning and maintenance workers to take the OSHA General Industries Course before starting work in the advertised jobs. Hundreds of applicants paid the \$349 fee based on NVG’s false representations, and took the OSHA course as required, but none of those applicants received the high-paying jobs they were promised.

Several victims complained to law enforcement, and some notified local media outlets. NVG relocated its offices from downtown Atlanta to East Point, Georgia, where the company continued its fraudulent activities. The company eventually disbanded in mid-October 2015, although both McCormick and Powell continued operating other similar, fraudulent job-staffing companies after NVG ceased operating.

On October 25, 2016, a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging McCormick and Powell for wire fraud conspiracy and ten substantive wire fraud counts. On August 31, 2017, McCormick

pled guilty to wire fraud conspiracy pursuant to a guilty plea agreement. On September 14, 2017, a federal grand jury returned a superseding indictment charging Powell with wire fraud conspiracy and three substantive counts of wire fraud. On December 11, 2017, after a four-day trial, a federal jury returned a verdict convicting Powell on one count of substantive wire fraud. The jury acquitted Powell on the other counts.

Erick Powell, 29, of New Windsor, New York, and Ahmad McCormick, 31, of Brooklyn, New York, will be sentenced in early 2018. Both defendants face a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment.

This case is being investigated by the U.S Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General. The East Point Police Department also provided assistance.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys John S. Ghose and Lynsey M. Barron are prosecuting the case.