

PRESS RELEASE

Three Former Local 98 Employees Sentenced for Illegal Use of Union Assets

Thursday, February 22, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Pennsylvania

PHILADELPHIA – United States Attorney Jacqueline C. Romero announced that Michael Neill, 57, Marita Crawford, 54, and Niko Rodriguez, 32, all of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, were sentenced this week by United States District Court Judge Jeffrey Schmehl. The defendants, all former employees of Local 98 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (“Local 98”), had previously pleaded guilty to stealing Local 98 funds for their personal use.

Michael Neill had served as the Training Director of Local 98’s Apprentice Training Fund since 2008. In December 2022, he pleaded guilty to four counts of embezzlement of labor union assets, one count of theft from a union employee benefit plan, and one count of making and subscribing to a false federal income tax return. As part of his guilty plea, Neill admitted having Local 98 and the Apprentice Training Fund pay for construction and maintenance work at his home, at Doc’s Union Pub, of which he was a part owner, and other personal properties by causing the submission of false invoices from May 2013 through December 2015.

Neill was sentenced to 13 months in prison, three years of supervised release, a fine of \$10,000, and a mandatory special assessment of \$600. Neill was ordered to pay restitution of \$92,733.67 and to forfeit the sum of \$25,259.29.

Marita Crawford had served as Local 98’s Political Director since November 2011. In December 2022, she pleaded guilty to four counts of wire fraud, which involved using her Local 98 credit card to pay for personal expenses for the benefit of herself and others, and, for some of the illegal expenditures, submitting false business-related explanations of the expenses to the union to disguise the illegal nature of the transactions. Crawford also admitted illegally using money from a political action

committee (PAC) called "New Gen1," funded primarily by contributions from Local 98's committee on political education ("COPE") and by the IBEW's similar fund in Washington, D.C., for personal purchases for herself and others.

Crawford was sentenced to 15 days in prison followed by three months of home confinement, three years of supervised release, a fine of \$2,000 and a mandatory special assessment of \$400. She was ordered to pay restitution of \$11,903 and to forfeit the sum of \$2,777.63.

Niko Rodriguez was employed by Local 98's Apprentice Training Fund and by Local 98 since 2011, primarily serving as a driver and personal assistant to Local 98's Business Manager, codefendant John Dougherty. In December 2022, he pleaded guilty to six counts of embezzlement of labor union assets. As part of his guilty plea, Rodriguez admitted using Local 98 credit cards to purchase personal goods for himself and Dougherty.

Rodriguez was sentenced to three years' probation, 80 hours of community service, a fine of \$5,000, and a mandatory special assessment of \$600. He was ordered to pay restitution of \$13,491 and to forfeit the sum of \$1,079.55.

"In using Local 98 funds to pay for personal expenses, these defendants broke the law, and they stole from the union's rank and file," said U.S. Attorney Romero. "Every one of those hardworking members needs to be able to trust that the dues they dutifully pay are in fact being used for the union's benefit, as intended. When that doesn't happen, when money is unlawfully misdirected, we and our partners won't hesitate to step in and hold those responsible to account."

"Investigating public corruption is a priority of the FBI and this includes ensuring the integrity of labor organizations and protecting the workers who trust them," said Wayne A. Jacobs, Special Agent in Charge of FBI Philadelphia. "These individuals betrayed the electrical union's members, those who rely on them to work with their best interest in mind, not out of greed. The FBI and our partners will continue to investigate and hold accountable those that pocket organizational funds for personal profit."

"IRS-Criminal Investigation is proud to have provided its financial expertise in this investigation," said Yury Kruty, Special Agent in Charge of IRS-Criminal Investigation. "We, along with our law enforcement partners and the Department of Justice, will continue to aggressively investigate individuals who engage in money laundering, tax fraud, or other types of white-collar crimes."

“Neill’s sentencing sends an important message to all those entrusted with protecting benefit plan assets. Regardless of title or position, the U.S. Department of Labor will hold fiduciaries to the highest standards of accountability to protect the employee benefits of America’s workers,” said U.S. Department of Labor’s Employee Benefits Security Administration Regional Director Cristina O’Brien in Philadelphia.

“Most union officials and employees do their work with great care, but union employees Michael Neill, Marita Crawford and Niko Rodriguez betrayed the trust and confidence placed in them by members of IBEW Local 98,” said U.S. Department of Labor Office of Labor-Management Standards Acting District Director Nicole Spallino in Philadelphia. “We remain committed to working with our law enforcement partners to identify criminal violations and pursue legal action when individuals unlawfully exploit their union positions at the expense of the union and its members.”

Sentencing hearings for codefendants Brian Fiocca, who pleaded guilty in December 2022, as well as codefendants Brian Burrows and John Dougherty, who were convicted at trial in December 2023, are scheduled for March, April, and May 2024, respectively.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation, the U.S. Department of Labor Employee Benefits Security Administration, the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Labor Management Standards, the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, and the Pennsylvania State Police, with assistance from the Pennsylvania Attorney General’s Office, and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Frank Costello, Bea Witzleben, Richard Barrett, Jason Grenell, and Anthony Carissimi.

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