

United States Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr.  
Western District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 28, 2011  
[www.usdoj.gov/usao/nyw](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nyw)

CONTACT: BARBARA J. BURNS  
PHONE: (716) 843-5817  
FAX: (716) 551-3051

**TWO CHARGED WITH BRIBING FEDERAL OFFICIAL**

BUFFALO, N.Y. - U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Joe Phouthavongsa, 49, and Sengchanh Sengsavath, 48, both of Rochester, NY, were arrested and charged by Criminal Complaint with bribing a public official. The charge carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison, a fine of \$250,000 or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Russell T. Ippolito, Jr., who is handling the case, stated that according to the Complaint, the defendants gave an immigration official \$5,000 in cash to pass two other unnamed individuals on an English language proficiency examination. The exam is part of the naturalization process to obtain United States Citizenship. Undercover law enforcement officers acted as immigration officials who were willing to accept a cash bribe in return for facilitating the naturalization of the associates of the two men. Phouthavongsa and Sengsavath were arrested outside the U.S. Courthouse after being told to appear for a feigned naturalization ceremony for their associates. The defendants themselves are naturalized United States citizens who were originally born in the country of Laos.

Phouthavongsa and Sengsavath appeared before Magistrate H. Kenneth Schroeder and were released on their own recognizance.

The Criminal Complaint is the culmination of an investigation by Special Agents of the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Gregory K. Knull and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Christopher M. Piehota.

The fact that a defendant has been charged with a crime is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

Barbara Burns  
Public Affairs Officer

United States Attorney's Office  
Western District of New York  
138 Delaware Ave.  
Buffalo, NY 14202  
(716) 843-5817 (office phone)  
(716) 225-3416 (cell number)  
(716) 551-3051 (fax number)