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Former Justice Department Employee Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Deceive U.S. Banks about Millions of Dollars in Foreign Lobbying Funds

A former employee with the U.S. Department of Justice pleaded guilty today for his role in a conspiracy to deceive banks in the United States about the source and purpose of millions of dollars sent from overseas to finance a lobbying campaign on behalf of foreign interests, announced Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benczkowski of the Justice Department's Criminal Division.

George Higginbotham, 46, of Washington, D.C., who was employed at the Justice Department as a Senior Congressional Affairs Specialist from July 2016 to August 2018, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to make false statements to a bank before U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly of the District of Columbia.

According to admissions made in connection with his plea, in 2017 Higginbotham helped facilitate the transfer of tens of millions of dollars from foreign bank accounts to accounts in the United States to finance a lobbying campaign to resolve civil and criminal matters related to the Department of Justice's investigation of the embezzlement and bribery scheme concerning 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). Higginbotham admitted that the foreign principal behind the lobbying campaign was alleged to be the primary architect of the 1MDB scheme. Higginbotham, as a Justice Department employee, played no role in any aspect of the investigation and failed to influence any aspect of the Department's investigation of 1MDB. Higginbotham further admitted that another purpose of the lobbying campaign was an attempt to persuade high-level U.S. government officials to have a separate foreign national, who was residing in the United States on a temporary visa at the time, removed from the United States and sent back to his country of origin.

In order to conceal the identity of the foreign principal behind the lobbying campaign, Higginbotham admitted to conspiring to make false statements to financial institutions in the United States concerning the source and purpose of the funds. Higginbotham also admitted to working on various fake loan and consulting documents in order to deceive banks and other regulators about the true source and purpose of the money.

The Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General and the FBI are investigating the case. Deputy Chief John Keller and Trial Attorneys Ryan Eilersick, James Mann, Sean Mulryne, and Nicole Lockhart of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section, and Deputy Chief Woo Lee and Trial Attorney Joshua Sohn of the Criminal Division's Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section are prosecuting the case.