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Williams Pleads Guilty

Ex-lawmaker says he deceived to win HUD mortgages

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STAFF WRITER

A day after resigning his seat, former Nassau Legislator Patrick Williams pleaded guilty yesterday in federal court to a single conspiracy charge for falsely inflating homebuyers' incomes to help them get mortgages.

Before he faced U.S. District Judge Joanna Seybert, Williams, 54, walked into the Central Islip courthouse looking proud, his shoulders high. He held his wife Hazeline's hand, moving deliberately.

During the hearing, Seybert asked him to explain his actions, and Williams offered a brief confession in a somber tone. "We inflated the income in order for the applicants to qualify for the mortgage," Williams said. He offered no reason for doing so.

Williams, of Uniondale, had been charged with conspiracy, lying to a federally insured bank and submitting false documents to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on mortgages he arranged from 1997 to 1999 when he worked as a mortgage broker for Amerifirst Mortgage Corp. of Hempstead.

Prosecutors argued that Williams fabricated tax returns, W-2 forms and pay stubs to help mortgage applicants. The borrowing ranged from \$74,000 to \$673,000 and totaled \$2.2 million, Assistant U.S. Attorney Eric Tirschwell said. Williams received \$51,000 in commissions on the fraudulent loans, which he will have to repay under a plea deal.

U.S. Attorney Alan Vinegrad said in a statement that Williams tried to help people obtain mortgages through deceit. "The serious charges in this case and the defendant's guilty plea should send a clear message that we will continue to vigorously investigate and prosecute the corruption of government programs," Vinegrad said.

Williams faces 6 months to a year in prison for the conspiracy conviction. Under the plea agreement the other charges were thrown out, but Tirschwell said it will be up to Seybert to decide the severity of the punishment.

Under sentencing guidelines, Tirschwell said the lowest sentence would be probation and 6 months of home confinement. Williams' sentencing is set for Nov. 15.

As he left court with his wife and attorney, Fred Brewington, Williams declined to speak to reporters.

Williams' supporters have portrayed him as an urban Robin Hood who used all of his powers to help people of modest means in his community who typically are unable to get access to home loans.

"I think the government could have spent its time frying bigger fish," said Legis. Roger Corbin (D-Westbury). "Patrick is not a criminal. In our community he should be looked at as a hero."

A widely respected member of the Legislature, Williams joined the body when Democrats took control in 1999. He became a maverick, articulate and vocal about what he perceived as longstanding neglect by the county in giving minority residents their fair share of county business and jobs.

Robert Summerville, president of the Freeport-Roosevelt branch of the NAACP, said Williams' resignation will be a loss to the First District, which covers communities of color such as Uniondale, Roosevelt, and portions of Freeport, Baldwin, Hempstead and East Meadow.

"Patrick... was able to accomplish more in a short period of time than other lawmakers were able to do in years," Summerville said.

Earlier this month Williams crafted legislation that would set aside millions of dollars in county contracts for minority and women-owned businesses. It is awaiting legislative approval.

Corbin, who also represents a heavily minority district, said, "I'm going to make sure that that legislation is passed. The things he [Williams] cared about will be done."



Hazeline and Patrick Williams arrive at U.S. District Court in Central Islip yesterday with attorney Fred Brewington.