

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Couple Pleads Guilty in Connection with Keeping a
Sri Lankan Woman in Their Home for Financial Gain

(More)

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CAMDEN – A couple pleaded guilty today to federal charges arising from their harboring of a illegal alien for the purpose of cheap or free domestic services, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Maher Jishi, 45, and his wife, Manal, 36, entered their pleas before U.S. District Judge Freda L. Wolfson. Sentencing is scheduled for July 22, 2005.

Maher Jishi pleaded guilty to Count One of a two-count Indictment, which charges him with concealing, harboring and shielding from detection a Sri Lankan alien who had entered and remained in the United States in violation of law for the purpose of private financial gain. The charge carries a statutory maximum prison sentence of 10 years and a fine of up to \$250,000. Manal Jishi pleaded guilty to a one-count Superseding Information that charges her with the misprison of a felony. The charge carries a statutory maximum prison sentence of three years and a fine of up to \$250,000.

At their plea hearings, Maher and Manal Jishi admitted that from April 2002 through February 2004, they employed Chandra Bulathwatte as a domestic employee, first in their home in Marlton and then in Washington Township, Gloucester County. They both admitted that they were aware that Bulathwatte was a citizen of Sri Lanka and that she was in the United States illegally.

They both admitted that the husband knowingly harbored and concealed Bulathwatte in their homes for the purpose of private financial gain, that is, cheap or free domestic services performed by Bulathwatte. Manal admitted she knew that such activity was illegal and constituted a felony, but did not notify the police or any other authorities about this felony (a misprison). She admitted that instead she took affirmative steps to conceal this felony, including instructing Bulathwatte to stay inside their home.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Wolfson will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time

Christie credited Special Agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of Special Agent in Kyle Hutchins in Newark.

The Government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Diana V. Carrig of the U.S. Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Camden.

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Defense Attorney: Maher Jishi - Jerome A. Ballarotto, Esq. Trenton
Manal Jishi - Mark W. Catanzaro, Esq. Moorestown