



PRESS RELEASE

Federal Agent Pleads Guilty to Making False Statements in Connection with a Sexual Relationship with a Victim Witness

Thursday, March 30, 2023

For Immediate Release

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

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Melissa Saurwein, 44, of Martinez, pleaded guilty Wednesday to one count of making a false statement in connection with a sexual relationship she had with a victim witness in a separate federal criminal case, U.S. Attorney Phillip A. Talbert announced.

According to court documents, Saurwein was formerly a Special Agent with Homeland Security Investigations in Northern California. While working in that capacity on the human trafficking case *United States v. Job Torres Hernandez*, 4:17-cr-462-JSW, Saurwein developed a romantic sexual relationship with a victim witness in the case. In preparation for Saurwein's testimony at trial, prosecutors asked Saurwein if she had a personal relationship with any witness or victim in the case. Saurwein lied in response to the questioning in order to conceal her sexual relationship with the victim witness. The human trafficking case then went to trial and both Saurwein and the victim witness testified. The relationship between Saurwein and the victim witness did not come to light until after the trial and sentencing of the defendant in the human trafficking case were complete. Due to Saurwein's conduct, the judgement in the human trafficking case was later vacated on the motion of the government, with the defendant having only served three years of his 103-month sentence.

This case is the product of an investigation by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Professional Responsibility. The U.S. Attorney's office for the Northern District was recused from this case, which is proceeding in the U.S. District Court in San Francisco. Special Attorney to the Attorney General Audrey B. Hemesath is prosecuting the case.

Sentencing is scheduled for June 28, 2023, before U.S. District Judge Vince Chhabria. Saurwein faces a maximum statutory penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of any applicable statutory factors and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables.