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Federal Grand Jury Indicts Union Official for Allegedly Extorting Cash Payments from Local Business

CHICAGO — A high-ranking official in a Chicago-area labor union threatened a local business with economic loss if it didn't pay him quarterly cash payments of \$25,000, according to a federal indictment returned today.

JOHN T. COLI SR. used the threat of economic harm to extort quarterly payments of \$25,000 from a local company, according to the indictment. The attempted extortion occurred from approximately October 2016 to April 2017, while Coli served as President of Teamsters Joint Council 25, a labor organization that represents more than 100,000 workers in the Chicago area and northwest Indiana. The organization has approximately 26 local union affiliates, including Teamsters Local Union 727, where Coli also served as Secretary-Treasurer during the time period referenced in the indictment.

The indictment was returned today in U.S. District Court in Chicago.

It charges Coli, 57, of Chicago, with one count of attempted extortion and five counts of demanding and accepting a prohibited payment as a union official.

The indictment seeks forfeiture from Coli of at least \$100,000.

Arraignment in federal court in Chicago will be held at a future time to be set by the Court.

The indictment was announced by Joel R. Levin, Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; Michael J. Anderson, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and James Vanderberg, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General in Chicago.

According to the charges, Coli accepted a \$25,000 cash payment on July 7, 2016; two cash payments totaling \$25,000 on Oct. 4, 2016, and Nov. 29, 2016; and \$25,000 cash payments on Dec. 22, 2016, and April 4, 2017. The indictment does not identify the individual who made the payments nor the company Coli allegedly extorted.

Coli previously served as International Vice President of the Central Region of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the indictment states.

The public is reminded that an indictment is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent and entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Attempted extortion is punishable by a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Each count of demanding and accepting a prohibited payment is punishable by up to five years in prison. If convicted, the Court must impose a reasonable sentence under federal statutes and the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Amarjeet S. Bhachu and Abigail Peluso.