

Undercover Sting Busts NY Man Scheming With Rabbis to Violently Extort Divorce

A New York man admitted in federal court Thursday to visiting New Jersey last year to violently coerce a Jewish man into giving his wife a religious divorce, the U.S. Attorney's Office announced.

David Hellman, 31, of Brooklyn, N.Y., has been accused of conspiring with nine other people— including two rabbis—in a scheme ending with an undercover sting operation at a warehouse in Edison, N.J., the office said in a news release.

Hellman, a personal trainer, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Freda L. Wolfson to traveling in interstate commerce to commit extortion, the office said.

Hellman potentially faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, the office said. His sentencing is scheduled for June 12.

Hellman admitted to traveling with seven co-conspirators on Oct. 9 from New York to the warehouse with the intention of forcing a Jewish man to give his wife a divorce document known under Jewish law as a “get,” the office said.

In the Orthodox Jewish community, a wife must secure a “get,” to sever the marriage and move on. Without it, she is unable to remarry and any future offspring she might have would be considered illegitimate. Husbands sometimes use the wife's desire for a “get” as a bargaining chip, demanding money or child custody in return for permission to end the marriage.

When Hellman arrived at the warehouse, he said the group met with an undercover FBI agent posing as the husband's brother-

in-law, the office said. Hellman said they discussed a plan and prepared to confine, restrain and threaten the man, the office said.

A team of FBI agents then arrested Hellman and the other members of the group—including Jay Goldstein, 59, Moshe Goldstein, 31, Avrohom Goldstein, 34, Simcha Bulmash, 30, Ariel Potash, 40, Binyamin Stimler, 38, and Sholom Shuchat, 29, the office said.

Two rabbis—Mendel Epstein, 68, and Martin Wolmark, 55—also were charged in the scheme, the office said.

All of the defendants live in Brooklyn, except Potash and Wolmark, who reside in Monsey, N.Y., the office said. Hellman is the first of the group to plead guilty, with charges pending against the others, the office said.

In Thursday's proceeding, Hellman also admitted that he and others visited a Brooklyn residence on Aug. 22, 2011, when they restrained, assaulted and injured a man to extort a divorce from him.

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