



PRESS RELEASE

Former Archdiocese Priest and Convicted Child Molester Sentenced for Passport Fraud and Ordered Removed from the United States

Monday, March 3, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Louisiana

ALEXANDRIA, La. – Acting United States Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook announced that **Jorge Antonio Velez-Lopez**, 69, a former Archdiocese priest and convicted child molester, has been sentenced by United States District Judge Dee D. Drell for passport fraud. Velez has been sentenced to 12 months in prison with credit for time served and a term of supervised release for one year. He was civilly denaturalized as a United States citizen and judicially ordered removed from the United States. As result, once Velez finishes serving his federal sentence and his sentence of imprisonment for a state offense he committed in Maryland, Velez will be remanded to the custody of Immigration Customs and Enforcement to be deported to Colombia.

According to documents introduced in court, Velez was born in Columbia and admitted to the U.S. as a temporary religious worker in 2003. On November 6, 2007, Velez was granted permanent residency. On March 15, 2013, he submitted an Application for Naturalization to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”). On his application, Velez stated under penalty of perjury that he had never committed a crime for which he had not been arrested, that he had never given false or misleading information to any U.S. Government official while applying for an immigration benefit, and that he had never lied to any U.S. Government official to gain entry or admission to the U.S. On May 23, 2013, Velez was interviewed by a USCIS officer orally confirmed that he had never given false or misleading information to any U.S. Government official while applying for an immigration benefit and had

never lied to any U.S. Government official to gain entry of admission to the U.S. while under oath and penalty of perjury. In a ceremony on May 29, 2013, Velez took the Oath of Allegiance and was naturalized as a United States citizen.

On September 27, 2013, Velez submitted a passport application as well as his naturalization certificate to the U.S. Department of State. Velez declared under penalty of perjury that he had not included any false documents in support of the application.

On February 19, 2020, in Howard County, Maryland, Velez was arrested by local authorities and charged with five counts of 3rd degree sex offense and one count of 4th degree sex offense. On May 14, 2021, in the Circuit Court for Howard County in Maryland, Velez pled guilty to sexual abuse of a minor for whom he had temporary responsibility for supervising, in violation of Maryland Criminal Code § 3-602(b)(1). He was sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 9 years and ordered to register as a sex offender for life. Velez confessed to having sexually abused the victim from June 19, 2005, through June 18, 2009, while serving as the child's priest.

"The United States Department of Justice, ICE, and our other federal law enforcement partners will use every tool in our arsenal to protect children and will prosecute and seek deportation of those who fraudulently obtain U.S. citizenship," said Acting United States Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook.

"This case sends a clear message to individuals who commit any type of sexual offense, particularly those involving children, during the naturalization process – we will ensure that justice is done," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Yaakov M. Roth. "The Justice Department's Office of Immigration Litigation will continue to hold individuals responsible for sexual offenses, especially those involving child victims."

The case was investigated by ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations division in New Orleans as part of Operation False Haven, an ongoing national initiative designed to identify and prosecute child molesters and other egregious felons who fraudulently obtained United States citizenship. Assistant U.S. Attorney Earl M. Campbell for the Western District of Louisiana prosecuted the case with assistance from Trial Attorney Devin Barrett with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Immigration Litigation and Autumn Cheramie with ICE's Office of the Principal Legal Advisor.

Rated court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Western District of Louisiana at www.lawd.uscourts.gov or at <https://www.lawd.uscourts.gov/cmecf-pacer> under case numbers 1:23-cr-00212 and 1:24-cv-01534.

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