



Former AC company employee admits to illegally notarizing customer signatures

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A former employee at a prominent Southwest Florida air conditioning and home services company admitted to illegally notarizing documents for the company in a court filing.

Detectives with the Cape Coral Police Department and the Florida Attorney General's office served a search warrant on Bruno Total Home Performance in January as part of a criminal investigation.

The Attorney General's office has received 213 complaints against Bruno since 2015 and has open criminal and civil investigations into the company.

Former customers are alleging in several civil lawsuits that someone at the company forged their signatures in order to sign them up for costly financing agreements for air conditioning work.

In a lawsuit filed in March in Lee County, Sandra Diaz claims she has multiple sclerosis and does not have the ability to sign her name. She says in the suit, a signature purported to be hers showed up on agreements created by the company. It was apparently validated by a Florida Driver's license and she claims she does not have a driver's license.

She also claims her signature was notarized by a Bruno employee.

That employee filed a statement with the court claiming that he would routinely stamp his notary seal to signatures that were collected in the field by other employees. He said Ms. Diaz never appeared in front of him to sign her name before he stamped the document.

"It's a criminal act," said Kevin Jursinski, an attorney who specializes in contractor law. "The person that encourages a notary to do that participates in a criminal act."

He said the notary stamping his seal to a signature not signed in front of him is a crime, but it is really problematic that it perpetuated another criminal act: a forgery.

Louis Bruno said he did not have knowledge of anyone at his company illegally notarizing documents.

His attorneys filed motions to dismiss the civil lawsuits that allege forgery, including the Diaz case. Several lawsuits, including the Diaz', from former customers are still ongoing.

He complained that his property was seized five months ago, without any criminal charges filed against him or others at his company.

"I plan to be in business another 30 years ... I'm going to aggressively clear my name when this is done," he told WINK news by phone.

He had a favorable ruling in a civil case from Collier County last month. In 2016, former customers claimed improper air conditioner installation work caused mold in their home.

A jury did not find any of the work to be improper and did not award the family any money.

But in the meantime, he has other financial hurdles to jump through.

JA McKinney properties filed to evict him from his Bonita Springs Headquarters in April claiming he owes more than \$40,000 in unpaid rent. He claimed he is working out the issue with his landlord.

In May, he failed to pay a fine to the Department of Business and Professional Regulation and his license was suspended. He claimed he was working out paying that fine. On Monday, his license status was listed as "probation", but the DBPR could not immediately confirm if he'd paid the fine.

The former employee and notary did not respond to phone calls from WINK News. JA McKinney properties did not respond to phone calls from WINK News.

An attorney for Sandra Diaz said she did not wish to be interviewed at this time.