

# DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE



United States Attorney Maria Chapa Lopez  
Middle District of Florida

Tampa

Orlando

Jacksonville

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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<http://www.justice.gov/usao/flm/>

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## **FORMER ATTORNEY CHARGED WITH CONSPIRACY, BANKRUPTCY FRAUD, AND DEFRAUDING CLIENTS OF \$1.3 MILLION**

Tampa, Florida – United States Attorney Maria Chapa Lopez announces the unsealing of an indictment charging James Lee Clark (59, Wilton Manors) with one count of conspiracy to commit bankruptcy fraud, seven counts of bankruptcy fraud, one count of making a falsification of records in a bankruptcy proceeding, and eight counts of wire fraud. If convicted, Clark faces up to 20 years' imprisonment for the falsification of records count and for each wire fraud count. He faces up to 5 years in federal prison for the conspiracy count, and for each bankruptcy fraud count. The indictment also notifies Clark that the United States is seeking a money judgment of \$1.3 million, the proceeds of the charged criminal conduct.

According to the indictment, from January 2010 through February 2017, Clark conspired with his paralegal, Eric Liebman, to defraud mortgage creditors and guarantors, such as Fannie Mae, who were holding mortgage notes on properties that were in foreclosure. The indictment further charges that Clark and Liebman falsely and fraudulently represented to the distressed homeowners facing foreclosure

that, in exchange for executing quitclaim or warranty deeds for their properties to an entity controlled by Liebman, they would negotiate with the mortgage creditors to prevent foreclosures. Clark and Liebman convinced the distressed homeowners to pay them rent, or agree to put their houses up for sale. In order to continue to collect ill-gotten rents, or profit from the sale of the properties, Clark allegedly filed fraudulent bankruptcy petitions in the names of the homeowners to prevent the mortgage creditors from lawfully foreclosing and taking title to the property. In some instances, Clark filed multiple fraudulent petitions in the names of distressed homeowners.

Additionally, it is further alleged that, from January 2012 to February 2017, Clark, who was a licensed attorney, defrauded his clients out of approximately \$1.3 million. As part of his practice, Clark would act as a trustee for his clients and also hold their money in various bank accounts depending on the purpose of trust. Instead of using the funds for the purpose intended by his clients, Clark would divert the money into his law firm's bank accounts and pay for personal expenses, such as gambling, travel, and automobiles.

Liebman pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit bankruptcy fraud on September 24, 2019. His sentencing hearing is scheduled for January 14, 2021.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Federal Housing Finance Agency – Office of Inspector General. The Office of United States Trustee for the Middle District of Florida, Tampa Division provided substantial investigative assistance. It will be prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Chris Poor.