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Torres gets 2 years

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Memo: Ran with fact box "Caught in Scandal" which has been appended to the story.

Angelo Torres spent about four years running the city's Hired Truck Program, pocketing more than \$60,000 in bribes and shaking down trucking outfits for campaign cash. For that, on Tuesday, he got two years in prison.

In a setback to prosecutors, a federal judge, in an often blistering tone, refused to nail Torres behind the prison time the prosecution wanted. The feds were looking to put Torres behind bars for more than six years for running a "thoroughly corrupt program."

Torres, 38, who grew up in Little Village, would pocket bribes from two city employees who wanted help ensuring trucking businesses got into the city's Hired Truck Program, even after the city had stopped letting in new companies.

Torres told U.S. District Judge James Holderman he was sorry on Tuesday.

"Not only did I disgrace my family, I think I did a disservice to the Latino community," Torres said. "But I still did accept bribes and I owe the citizens of Chicago an apology."

But prosecutors argued Torres wasn't truly accepting responsibility, noting he wouldn't talk about two trucking companies involved in the program. Torres had safety concerns because he believed the two companies had ties to the mob.

Torres also wouldn't admit the precise amount of bribes he took.

"He's not admitted everyone who paid him or how much he took," Assistant U.S. Attorney Barry Miller argued before the judge.

Torres' attorney, Ted Poulos, bristled at the prosecution's statements, noting that Torres admitted to a host of bad deeds he wasn't charged with.

And the judge agreed, barking, "I think the government is requesting too much detail here."

The sentencing hearing was rife with tension. Prosecutors had an agreement with Torres' defense attorneys to postpone the sentencing, but Holderman rejected that, moving ahead. Holderman, who has a history of bad relations with the U.S. Attorney's office and whose temperament has been criticized, verbally battered Miller and rejected every request he made to increase Torres' sentence.

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While Torres was sentenced to two years in prison, that time could increase or decrease based on various factors.

GANG MEMBER IN GRADE SCHOOL

Torres asked to be put in an alcohol rehabilitation program, and the judge agreed. If Torres successfully completes the program, he could receive up to a year off his sentence.

But Torres could be looking at more time if prosecutors decide to give him immunity on other possible crimes and put him before the grand jury investigating the Hired Truck Program, forcing him to testify.

If Torres refuses, he could face an additional 18 months behind bars.

Torres also hit up trucking firms for at least \$10,000 in political contributions to state Sen. Tony Munoz and the Hispanic Democratic Organization, according to court records and sources. Munoz got Torres his city job as an entry-level worker booting cars in 1996, sources said.

Torres, a gang member in grade school, started working in the Hired Truck Program in 1997 and quickly rose from there, eventually running a program with annual expenditures of about \$40 million. Mayor Daley has never said who gave Torres a job of such responsibility. Torres' attorney, **Marc Martin**, said in court Tuesday that Torres should have never been in that job in the first place.

"Why the city put Angelo Torres in that position is beyond me," Martin said.

The Sun-Times first cast attention on Torres in January 2004 when a three-day series began reporting on corruption in the Hired Truck Program. The stories included Torres' role in getting his father-in-law into the truck program. Torres was the first person to be arrested as part of the federal investigation sparked by the Sun-Times series. He was immediately fired.

He's now unemployed and has filed for bankruptcy.

Prosecutors noted in a court filing that Torres didn't tell the truth when he told a court official during an interview "that it was his idea to move out of the position of the Director of the Hired Truck Program, when his supervisors at the City's Budget Office tried to force him out."

During that time, Torres had his defenders in the mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, which is currently under federal investigation for illegal hiring practices based on politics, sources said. The Office of Intergovernmental Affairs went to bat for Torres when the budget office was working to remove him because he wasn't doing his job and trying to accumulate power, sources said.

CAUGHT IN SCANDAL:

30 people have been charged in the federal government's ongoing investigation of the city's Hired Truck Program.

22 people have pleaded guilty, including eight city workers.

1 man who was charged will never go to trial because he died after a freak horseback-riding accident.

Photo: Scott Stewart/Sun-Times / Angelo Torres, the former head of the Hired Truck Program, leaves the Dirksen Federal Building with attorney **Marc Martin** (left) after Torres was sentenced to two years in prison.; Photo: Brian Jackson/Sun-Times / The Sun-Times first cast attention on Torres in January 2004, when this picture was first published.;

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