



## State of New Jersey

### **Assemblyman Albert Coutinho Pleads Guilty To Stealing Funds From Charitable Foundation and Filing False Disclosure Forms**

*Former lawmaker from Newark will be permanently barred from holding public office or public employment in New Jersey as a result of admitting crimes*

Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman announced that New Jersey Assemblyman Albert Coutinho pleaded guilty today to criminal charges for stealing funds from his family's charitable foundation and filing false financial disclosure forms with the Legislature.

Coutinho, 44, of Newark, yesterday resigned from his 29th Legislative District Assembly seat. He pleaded guilty this morning to a third-degree theft by unlawful taking and a fourth-degree charge of falsifying or tampering with records before Superior Court Judge Gerald J. Council in Mercer County. As a result of his guilty plea, he will be permanently barred from holding public office or public employment in New Jersey.

In pleading guilty, Coutinho admitted to misappropriating, between 2008 and 2012, donations and contributions to his family's charitable foundation, the Bernardino Coutinho Foundation. As part of its investigation, the state reviewed Coutinho's conduct as a trustee and officer of the Bernardino Coutinho Foundation, a nonprofit charitable organization run by Coutinho's family which is devoted to community development and cultural education in the Portuguese community of Newark's Ironbound district. The Foundation previously ran the annual Portuguese Day Festival, but ceased to be involved in organizing the event after 2009. The investigation revealed that between January 2008 and December 2012, Coutinho personally cashed numerous checks, representing approximately \$32,500 in donations and contributions to the family's foundation, at a check cashing business. In pleading guilty, Coutinho admitted to taking and using those donations for his own personal benefit and for purposes unrelated to any legitimate, Foundation-related business. In connection with the second charge, Coutinho separately admitted that he also failed to disclose in his legislative Financial Disclosure Statements for calendar years 2008 through 2012 the income he received as a consequence of his theft and misappropriation of Foundation funds.

"Assemblyman Coutinho committed a crime by stealing funds from a charitable foundation and failing to report income as part of his financial disclosure obligations as a legislator," said Acting Attorney General Hoffman. "In doing so, he failed the people of New Jersey, who rightfully expect their elected representatives to uphold the laws of this state and act with integrity at all times."

"The lesson here is that no one is above the law, including those charged with making the law," said Director Elie Honig of the Division of Criminal Justice. "Through this prosecution, and others, we are enforcing a standard of integrity for public officials in New Jersey."

Under the plea agreement, the state will recommend that Coutinho be sentenced to a term of probation. Coutinho will also be required to make full restitution to the Foundation for any donations or other Foundation funds that he misappropriated. Judge Council scheduled sentencing for Coutinho for October 24, 2013.

Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey J. Manis prosecuted the case and took the guilty plea for the Division of Criminal Justice. The charges resulted from a joint investigation by the Division of Criminal Justice Corruption Bureau and the Division of Taxation's Office of Criminal Investigations. The investigation was

conducted for the Division of Criminal Justice by Deputy Attorney General Manis, lead Division of Criminal Justice detectives Sgt. Harry Maronpot and Sgt. James Scott, Lt. Daniel O'Brien and analyst Kathy Ratliff. Division of Criminal Justice detectives Janine Buchalski, Scott Donlan, Timothy Heron, and Sgt. David Salzmann also participated in the investigation. The Division of Criminal Justice was assisted by Special Agents Bruce Stuck, William Makar, and Paul Honan of the Division of Taxation's Office of Criminal Investigations.

Coutinho first served in the New Jersey General Assembly from May 1997 to January 1998, after being appointed to fill the unexpired term of Jackie R. Mattison. He was first elected to the Assembly in November 2007 and has served continuously as an assemblyman since January 2008, winning re-election in 2009 and 2011. He served as a commissioner on the Newark Central Planning Board from 1996 to 2005, and as a Zoning Board of Adjustment commissioner from 1993 to 1996. He served as an Essex County Utilities Authority Commissioner from 1992 to 1998.

Acting Attorney General Hoffman and Director Honig noted that the Division of Criminal Justice Corruption Bureau has established a confidential toll-free Corruption Tipline 1-866-TIPS-4CJ. The public also can log on to the Division's Web site [www.njdcj.org](http://www.njdcj.org) to confidentially report suspected wrongdoing.