



RIVERSIDE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
NEWS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**DA'S OFFICE FILES CIVIL ACTION AGAINST FOUR MEN
IN AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT LAWSUIT SCHEME**

RIVERSIDE – Today, April 25, 2019, District Attorney Mike Hestrin announced that the Riverside County District Attorney's Office has filed a civil law enforcement action against four individuals and two law firms for violating California's Unfair Competition Laws by filing fraudulent lawsuits against small business owners in Riverside County.

The defendants are James Rutherford, DOB: 1-19-52; attorney Babak Hashemi, DOB 9-21-78; attorney Joseph Manning Jr., DOB 5-15-68; attorney Craig Cote, DOB 8-19-51; and attorney Michael Manning, DOB 4-16-76. Also listed as defendants in the case are the Law Offices of Babak Hashemi and Manning Law, APC.

There are two causes of action filed in this case, one pursuant to the Unfair Competition Law in Business and Professions Code section 17200, and one pursuant to the False Advertising Law in Business and Professions Code section 17500.

The defendants are accused of filing more than 100 lawsuits against individuals and small businesses in Riverside County alleging violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The defendants specifically identified small businesses for the purpose of targeting them with fraudulent lawsuits. The defendants made misrepresentations in the legal documents they filed with the courts in an effort to obtain monetary settlements from the businesses.

Abusive ADA lawsuit practices are not new, but the defendants in this case are responsible for a significant volume of the ADA lawsuits that have been filed in Southern California over the last several years. Rutherford has been a party-plaintiff in more than 200 separate ADA lawsuits the defendants have filed against businesses in San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties.

The Riverside County District Attorney's Office fully supports accessibility rights for disabled persons. The ADA laws are designed to help and protect disabled persons. The individuals who make false statements in court and the attorneys who manipulate these laws do so for the purpose of illegitimate financial gain. These abuses not only hurt the specific small business owners, they also jeopardize the long term legal protections of the disabled persons these laws were designed to help.

The DA's Office asks that anyone with any information about this case contact DA Sr. Investigator Joel Pabelico via email at ADAvictim@rivcoda.org. Please leave your contact information, including your name and the best telephone number at which to be reached.

The case, RIC1902577, is being prosecuted by Deputy District Attorneys Timothy Brown and Harold Anderson of the DA's Special Prosecutions Section.

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