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PRESS RELEASE

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Middleman Sentenced to 110 Months for Facilitating Bribes Between Nightclub and Bar Owners and a District Tax Official **The Schemes Deprived the District of at Least \$2.3 Million**

WASHINGTON – Anthony Merritt, 48, was sentenced today to 110 months in prison for facilitating bribes to a District tax official from business owners who wanted to evade tax obligations, announced U.S. Attorney Matthew M. Graves, FBI Special Agent in Charge David J. Scott of the Washington Field Office Criminal and Cyber Division, D.C. Inspector General Daniel W. Lucas, and the D.C. Chief Financial Officer Glen Lee.

Merritt, of Capitol Heights, Maryland, played key roles in at least two sophisticated and long-term bribery conspiracies. For Vincent Slater, who formerly served in the D.C. Office of Tax and Revenue, Merritt handled communications with business owners and allowed Slater to maintain apparent distance from them as he fraudulently reduced their liabilities or intervened on their behalf within OTR. For business owners, Merritt ferried cash bribe payments to Slater. And for himself, Merritt took a cut—or sometimes times, all—of the bribe payments that drove the scheme. Through his actions, Merritt deprived the District of Columbia of at least \$2.3 million.

Merritt was charged in two separate indictments, one for each of the separate conspiracies. In June 2023, a jury convicted Merritt of the bribery, conspiracy, and wire-fraud charges from the first indictment. In September 2023, Merritt pleaded guilty to the bribery, conspiracy, and wire-fraud offenses charged in the second indictment.

In addition to the prison sentence, U.S. District Judge Reggie B. Walton ordered Merritt to serve three years of supervised release and to pay restitution of \$736,536.52 (of at least \$200 per month), and to forfeit \$581,378.77.

Slater pleaded guilty on bribery counts in June 2020 and admitted to causing a total loss of more than \$3 million to the District. In addition, Slater admitted that typically, he and Merritt

agreed to solicit bribe payments equaling approximately half of the amount the taxpayer sought to evade paying, and then to split the bribe proceeds between themselves. Slater resigned from OTR in December 2017, concluding both schemes, each of which had lasted over five years.

A former employee of the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, Merritt held himself out as a permit and licensing expediter and introduced the business owners to the scheme.

Judge Walton sentenced two business owners on January 25, 2024, for their respective roles in the separate but concurrent multiyear schemes. Andre De Moya, 51, of Temple Hills, Maryland, received 30 months in prison. Davoud Jafari, 72, of the District of Columbia, was sentenced to 24 months in prison.

The businesses that benefited from De Moya's participation in the scheme included concert venue Echostage as well as downtown bars and nightclubs such as Eyebar (later renamed Eden), Ultrabar, L8 Lounge, and Barcode. Evidence at trial showed that De Moya also introduced additional business owners to Merritt, leading to parallel schemes involving restaurants Café Asia and Umaya and nightclub Muse Lounge. Jafari owned and operated Zeba Bar in Columbia Heights through a company called Gevani, Inc.

In announcing Merritt's sentencing, U.S. Attorney Graves commended the work of the agencies who investigated the case, including the FBI's Washington Field Office and the District of Columbia Office of the Inspector General, with substantial assistance by the District of Columbia Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Office of Integrity and Oversight. U.S. Attorney Graves also expressed appreciation for the efforts of those who handled the case for the U.S. Attorney's Office, including Paralegal Specialists Liliana Villamizar, Amanda Rhode, and Mariela Andrade, and former paralegal specialists Aisha Keys and Michon Tart.

Finally, Graves acknowledged the work of Assistant U.S. Attorneys Christine Macey, Emily Miller, and Timothy Visser, who prosecuted these cases through trial, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Molly Gaston and former AUSA Amanda Vaughn, who participated in the underlying investigations and earlier court proceedings.

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