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## **Former OC Sheriff's Deputy Pleads Guilty to Six Counts of Insurance Fraud for Falsifying Claims About Work-Related Injury**

**Santa Ana, CA** (February 22, 2017) — A former Orange County Sheriff's Department Deputy Sheriff II, pled guilty for defrauding the County of Orange of nearly \$35,000 by making fraudulent statements and knowingly failing to disclose facts related to his workers' compensation claim.

Nicholas Zappas, 36 years old, pled guilty to six misdemeanor counts of insurance fraud for knowingly failing to disclose his true physical abilities to his workers' compensation medical providers.

At the time of the crimes, Zappas worked as a Deputy Sheriff II for the Orange County Sheriff's Department; he claimed that he injured his neck and back while working on a fireboat for the Sheriff's Department Harbor Patrol on April 2, 2015. He told the workers' compensation doctor that he had difficulty lifting the heavy equipment required as a harbor patrol officer. The doctor provided a work restriction of no lifting over 10 pounds which was accommodated by the department by assigning him to modified duties. However, Mr. Zappas did not tell the doctor he was able to instruct Cross Fit classes at a gym, lift very heavy barbells exceeding the 10 pound restriction, as well as surf, ski and move furniture.

In May 2015, the County began investigating this case after other County employees reported Zappas was performing activities inconsistent with a back injury requiring work restrictions of no lifting over 10 pounds, and that he was posting pictures of the activities on line.

Mr. Zappas paid \$34,936.87 to the County in restitution for unnecessary medical treatment and investigative costs and \$1,000 to the State Workers' Compensation Assessment Fund. He will be sentenced to 180 days in the Orange County Jail and will be placed on three years of informal probation. As a condition of probation, he will be required to dismiss his other workers' compensation claims. Mr. Zappas resigned from the County in January 2017.

The County of Orange diligently investigates suspected workers' compensation fraud; this is the fourth arrest of a County claimant in the past two years. Zappas is the third claimant convicted, the fourth is scheduled for a pre-trial conference on March 7, 2017.

Deputy District Attorney Pam Leitao of the Insurance Fraud Unit prosecuted these County cases.

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