

Mafia Captain Sentenced for \$25M Gambling Operation

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– Categories: Crime



A longtime member of the Lucchese organized crime family has been sentenced to nearly two years in prison after pleading guilty to running a massive illegal online gambling operation that federal prosecutors say brought in almost \$25 million over 25 years.

Anthony Villani, a 60-year-old resident of Elmsford, New York, pleaded guilty on January 30, 2025, before United States District Judge Kiyo A. Matsumoto; no sentencing date has yet been announced, and he faces up to 20 years in prison. Authorities identified Villani as a captain in the Lucchese crime family, one of New York's long-standing Mafia organizations.

At the center of the case was Rhino Sports, an online gambling business that Villani operated for more than two decades. Prosecutors say the operation was based in the Bronx and operated through offshore servers, earning over \$1 million annually. Villani recruited several “trusted associates,” many with their reputations in organized crime, to help him manage the day-to-day betting activities.

Among those who worked for him were co-defendants James Coumoutsos and Michael Praino, known by their nicknames “Quick” and “Platinum,” respectively. Their job was to act as local bookmakers, taking bets and managing customer accounts across the region.

But gambling wasn’t the only crime Villani was involved in. Between October 2019 and October 2020, he reportedly extorted a person who had stolen \$300,000 from Rhino Sports. Prosecutors revealed audio recordings of Villani threatening the individual, making it clear that failure to return the money would come with serious consequences. The man believed he would be physically harmed or worse if he didn’t comply.

Villani’s threats were blunt and menacing. In one recorded conversation, he warned, “We’re just going to have a problem if I find out... and I don’t want to threaten you with my friends or anything.” In another, he demanded repayment, saying, “Go get this money.”

Federal prosecutors from the Eastern District of New York’s Organized Crime and Gangs Section led the investigation, which ultimately resulted in Villani pleading guilty to racketeering, illegal gambling, and money laundering charges.

While Villani’s prison sentence may be seen as a relatively short one given the scope of the operation, federal officials emphasized that the case underscores ongoing efforts to hold organized crime figures accountable, especially those who continue to run criminal enterprises in the digital age.

With Villani behind bars and his gambling empire dismantled, authorities have sent a strong message that even deeply entrenched Mafia figures are not beyond the reach of the law.

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