

# Immigration Department smashes syndicate using false instruments to apply for foreign domestic helper working visas

The licensee of an employment agency, who had conspired to use false instruments to apply for foreign domestic helper (FDH) working visas, has pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to defraud and using copies of false instruments. She was sentenced to 24 months' imprisonment today (July 24) at the District Court. Five Filipinos involved in the case had been convicted earlier for the offence of making false representation to an immigration officer and breach of condition of stay at the Magistrates' Courts.

The mastermind was a 55-year-old Hong Kong resident who was the licensee of the employment agency. Since December 2017, the Immigration Department had detected several suspicious pay-television service bills submitted for foreign domestic helper visa applications through the employment agency. After months of in-depth investigation and intelligence analysis, a syndicate was identified as having arranged Filipinos to work in Hong Kong illegally through the use of false FDH contracts. In March 2018, the Immigration Department triggered the enforcement action. Fourteen persons, including the mastermind, four other Hong Kong residents and nine Filipinos who had applied for the FDH visas using false contracts, were apprehended. In addition, two computers and a considerable number of false instruments were seized, including originals and copies of forged bank statements and pay-television service bills.

During the investigation, investigators discovered that the mastermind made use of unlawfully obtained Hong Kong identity card copies and false salary and residential proof, such as forged bank statements, electricity and gas bills as well as telecommunications service and pay-television service bills to apply for FDH working visas.

After an investigation, the mastermind was prosecuted. She was sentenced to 24 months' imprisonment for the offences of six counts of conspiracy to defraud and five counts of using copies of false instruments. Regarding the bogus FDHs arrested, five were prosecuted and convicted of making false representation to an immigration officer and breach of condition of stay at the Magistrates' Courts earlier, and have already been sentenced with the highest sentence of four months' imprisonment.

An investigation of the other suspects is continuing.

"It is an offence to make, possess or use false instruments. Upon conviction, offenders are liable to a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. In addition, it is an offence to make false representation to an immigration officer. Offenders are liable to prosecution and to a maximum

fine of \$150,000 and imprisonment for 14 years. Furthermore, anyone who commits the offence of conspiracy to defraud is liable to prosecution and, upon conviction, the maximum penalty is imprisonment for 14 years," an Immigration Department spokesman said.

The spokesman also stressed that FDHs should only take up employment as a domestic helper as approved by the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for two years. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution.