

Five indicted in healthcare theft from union

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Five Northwest Indiana men were indicted this week for allegedly stealing thousands of dollars in healthcare reimbursements from their union in 2013, and more defendants could be added, according to a press release from the Northern Indiana U.S. Attorney's Office in Hammond.

All five had filed plea deals by Thursday admitting to requesting reimbursements for fake medical expenses from May 1, 2013, through June 6, 2013, from the Indiana-Kentucky-Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters. The men were members of the union, which represents about 32,000 people, helping members pay for some out-of-pocket medical expenses, according to the plea deals.

Robert Gutierrez, 38, of Hammond, is accused of stealing \$19,771; Dennis Gardner, 52, of LaPorte, \$15,000; Bradley Crostreet, 45, of Valparaiso, \$10,310.83; Aaron Vaughan, 35, of Lake Station, of \$13,000; and Joshua Westfall, 38, of LaPorte, of \$6,380.

"As the investigation continues, we hope to charge others," according to the release.

Court dates have already been set for some of the defendants. Westfall plans to plead guilty and be sentenced in federal court Sept. 12, while Gardner, Gutierrez, Crostreet are scheduled to do the same the following day, according to court records. Vaughan's next court date hadn't been scheduled as of Friday afternoon.

Each of the men face a maximum sentence of one year in prison.

A call to the union's Hobart hub was not returned by press time Friday.

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