

Amid Modest Sentences, Prosecutors Bring New Charges in Admissions Scandal

Prosecutors added bribery counts against Lori Loughlin and other parents who have fought the accusations. Felicity Huffman, among those to plead guilty, is serving her sentence.



By **Kate Taylor**

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — As Felicity Huffman, the actress and parent who pleaded guilty in the sprawling college admissions scandal, neared the end of a two-week prison camp sentence, prosecutors on Tuesday pressed new charges against other parents, including the actress Lori Loughlin, who have fought the cases against them.

Marking an aggressive new posture in the case, prosecutors filed bribery charges against Ms. Loughlin and 10 other parents who had pleaded not guilty to earlier fraud and money laundering counts. The prosecutors also brought new fraud charges against several parents, and an array of new charges against coaches and others charged in the scheme.

Federal prosecutors declined to comment on the new charges. But lawyers involved in the case said prosecutors were motivated in part by frustration with the sentences already given out in a scandal that has swept up an array of prominent parents accused of paying to cheat on college admissions tests or to bribe college coaches.

After the authorities revealed the scandal in March, Ms. Huffman and roughly a dozen other parents quickly pleaded guilty. Their sentences, all less than what prosecutors had sought, have ranged from probation to five months in prison. Ms. Huffman, who acknowledged paying \$15,000 to cheat on her daughter's SAT, is scheduled to finish her prison camp sentence on Sunday.

For weeks, prosecutors warned defense lawyers that they planned to bring new charges and advised defendants to agree to plead guilty if they wanted to avoid being included. With a deadline looming, four parents pleaded guilty on Monday.

Ms. Loughlin and her husband, Massimo Giannulli, were accused of paying \$500,000 to get their two daughters, Olivia Jade and Isabella Giannulli, designated as recruits to the women's crew team at the University of Southern California even though they were not qualified, ensuring their admission. U.S.C. said in a statement from the registrar on Monday that the two were no longer enrolled; it declined to give any further information, citing student privacy laws.

Among new details revealed in court filings on Tuesday, prosecutors said that Mr. Giannulli had at one point forwarded along to his accountant a \$200,000 invoice connected to their older daughter's admission to U.S.C. Along with the invoice, prosecutors say, Mr. Giannulli wrote: "Good news my daughter ... is in [U]SC ... bad is I had to work the system."

Hollywood gossip magazines have reported that Ms. Loughlin was increasingly worried about the case and regretted her not-guilty plea. A lawyer for Ms. Loughlin did not respond to a request for comment.



Lori Loughlin after a court appearance in August.
Katherine Taylor for The New York Times

The parents who have pleaded not guilty in the case had previously been charged with money laundering conspiracy as well as conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud and honest services mail and wire fraud. On Tuesday, most of them, including Ms. Loughlin, were also charged with conspiracy to commit federal programs bribery, which involves theft from or bribery of an agent of an organization that receives more than \$10,000 in federal funds in a one-year period. All of those parents are accused of agreeing to pay bribes to get their children admitted to U.S.C.

The federal programs bribery charge provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison. For any parents who are convicted, that charge would most likely lead to higher advisory sentencing guidelines ranges, potentially determined by how much each parent paid as part of the scheme. This would address a sore spot for the prosecutors, who have argued that the guidelines ranges for the fraud

charges that Ms. Huffman and others pleaded guilty to should be determined by how much each parent paid — which would have led in some cases to ranges of two or more years in prison. But the judge who has been sentencing them has disagreed.

Still, given that judges regularly depart from sentencing guidelines, it is not clear how the added bribery charges would actually affect parents' sentences, if any are convicted.

A lawyer for Robert Zangrillo, the founder of a Miami-based investment firm, whom prosecutors have accused of paying \$250,000 to have his daughter admitted to U.S.C. as a crew recruit, issued a statement criticizing the new charges against him. The lawyer, Martin Weinberg, has described Mr. Zangrillo as no different from other parents who make a donation to a university in the hopes of getting an advantage for their child in the admissions process.

“Donations that were received and welcomed by universities have never before been characterized as bribes,” Mr. Weinberg said. “This attempted and unprecedented expansion of federal bribery laws is unwarranted.”

Prosecutors also brought new fraud charges against Donna Heinel, a former senior associate athletic director at U.S.C., and a handful of coaches and others who had previously been charged with racketeering conspiracy. Prosecutors have accused Ms. Heinel of taking bribes in exchange for falsely presenting applicants as athletes, facilitating their admission.

A lawyer for Ms. Heinel, Nina Marino, said on Tuesday, “The zeal with which this U.S. attorney’s office strives to have long prison sentences hanging over these individuals’ heads is staggering.”

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