

MIAMI HERALD

Fraud suspect plotted to hire hitman to ‘take care of’ Miami prosecutor, state alleges

By David Ovalle

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Jorge Espinosa, the father of a former Miami-Dade cop who resigned after a controversial shooting, is a public adjuster awaiting trial on a massive insurance-fraud scam.

But when Espinosa was jailed recently, authorities say, he plotted with a fellow inmate to try to hire a hitman to assassinate the prosecutor and star witness in his case. But the supposed plot won't result in new charges. After the inmate told prosecutors, an undercover investigation fizzled.

The allegations were concerning enough, however, that the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office on Friday will ask a judge to keep Espinosa, 62, behind bars before his trial.

“While the defendant's plan with the [informant] has now been exposed, there is no custody-release restriction that this court could possibly impose that would prevent the defendant from contacting any other hitman to carry out his plan,” Assistant State Attorney Helen Page Schwartz wrote in a motion to the judge.

Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Mark Blumstein heard some testimony on the case Friday afternoon, and the hearing will likely continue next week on whether to keep Espinosa behind bars

Espinosa's defense lawyer insisted that his client did nothing.



Jorge Espinosa
Miami-Dade Corrections

“There is no evidence and there are no charges,” said defense attorney Juan Gonzalez. “The whole thing seems to be B.S. based on the word of a jailhouse snitch.”

Espinosa was [arrested in 2014](#) as part of a large-scale investigation that netted more than 50 arrests of people charged with cheating insurance companies out of more than \$7 million by intentionally setting fires and causing floods in homes across the state.

Prosecutors say Espinosa owned and operated Nationwide Adjusters and worked with recruiters and “finders” across Florida to locate homeowners willing to allow him to set fires or flood their homes before filing insurance claims.

Espinosa is the father of former Miami-Dade police officer Jorge A. Espinosa, who drew intense scrutiny in 2004 after he shot and killed an unarmed teenaged burglar named Leonardo Barquin. Prosecutors declined to file charges, citing insufficient evidence, flawed police work and a state law that allows police to fire at fleeing felons.



Jorge Antonio Espinosa, the former Miami-Dade police officer who was later charged with insurance fraud. His father is accused of trying to arrange the murder of a prosecutor.
Miami-Dade Corrections

But the officer resigned any way and took up work in the same business as his father, operating as a licensed public adjuster. In 2010, state prosecutors charged the younger Espinosa with a separate insurance scam, one that involved inflating the price of insurance claims. The criminal case dragged through the courts for seven years before he took a plea last year and accepted probation.

The elder Espinosa, meanwhile, had been out on bail while awaiting trial. But in early January, he was jailed after he repeatedly failed to appear for court hearings. It was while he was in jail that prosecutors say he ran into the secret police informant, whom he knew from around Hialeah.

Espinosa asked the man whether he could hook up with a mutual acquaintance known only as “Lazaro” — a supposed hitman from Hialeah.

He allegedly said he wanted the case’s longtime prosecutor, Laura Uriarte, “taken care of.” “The defendant told the [informant] that the state attorney had been nasty and that she won’t let it go,” according to the prosecution.

Espinosa was released days later. An undercover detective, posing as a hitman, later called whom he believed was Espinosa to try and set up a deal. The man on the phone blew off the undercover cop, according to court documents.

But Espinosa was arrested yet again in early February on new allegations that he was secretly stealing electricity from Florida Power & Light at his home. Again he ran into the inmate, telling him he believed it was his son who had answered his phone and blew off the supposed hitman.

He also told the inmate he still wanted to do the deal and was setting aside \$18,000 for the job. He also said he owns a property in the Dominican Republic “where he could go hide out and live like a king.”

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