

The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO Act) is a United States federal law that provides for extended criminal penalties and allows for civil action for acts performed as part of an ongoing criminal organization.

RICO was enacted as part of the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970. While it's intended use was to prosecute the Mafia as well as others who were actively engaged in organized crime, its application has been more widespread.

Under RICO, a person who is a member of an enterprise that has committed any two of 35 crimes—27 federal crimes and 8 state crimes—within a 10-year period can be charged with racketeering.

Those found guilty of racketeering can be fined up to \$25,000 and sentenced to 20 years in prison per racketeering count. In addition, the racketeer must forfeit all ill-gotten gains and interest in any business gained through a pattern of "racketeering activity." RICO permits a private individual harmed by the actions of such an enterprise to file a civil suit; if successful, the individual can collect damages.

Despite its harsh provisions, a RICO-related charge is considered easy to prove in court, as it focuses on patterns of illegal behavior as opposed to criminal acts.

Under the law, racketeering activity means;

A violation of STATE law involving gambling, murder, kidnapping, extortion, arson, robbery, bribery, dealing with obscene matter or dealing in narcotics.

A violation of FEDERAL law involving bribery, counterfeiting, theft, embezzlement, fraud, dealing with obscene matter, obstruction of justice, gambling, money laundering, murder-for-hire, drug trafficking, assisting aliens in illegally entering the country, acts of terrorism and a few others.

The pattern of activity requires at least two acts of racketeering activity, one of which occurred after the effective date of this chapter (1970) and the last of which occurred within ten years after the commission of a prior act of racketeering activity.

Although some of the RICO acts are extortion and blackmail, one of the most successful applications of the RICO laws has been the ability to indict or sanction individuals for their behavior and actions committed against witnesses and victims in alleged retaliation or retribution for cooperating with law enforcement agencies.

For more details visit this web site; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racketeer_Influenced_and_Corrupt_Organizations_Act