



BUSINESS INTEGRITY COMMISSION

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THE BUSINESS INTEGRITY COMMISSION ANNOUNCES 14 ARRESTS IN A LONG-TERM NARCOTICS INVESTIGATION IN THE CITY'S PUBLIC WHOLESALE PRODUCE MARKET IN HUNTS POINT

Undercover NYPD detectives discovered criminal sales and possession of heroin, cocaine and fentanyl in one of the largest produce markets in the world.

NEW YORK, NY — Today, the Bronx County District Attorneys Office announced that a long-term narcotics investigation in the City's public wholesale produce market in Hunts Point, Bronx (the "Market"), conducted by the NYPD detective squad assigned to the Business Integrity Commission ("BIC"), along with BIC investigators, has resulted in a series of arrests and indictments of a total of 14 individuals. The investigation focused on sales of heroin and cocaine in and around the Market, and each defendant was charged with felonies related to the sale and/or possession of those controlled substances.

Five of the defendants are current or former employees, and one is a regular produce buyer, in the Market. The criminal investigation was conducted mainly through the use of undercover NYPD detectives posing as narcotics buyers. Of the more than 20 narcotics sales charged in the case, many took place inside the Market itself. Laboratory analyses of some of the heroin purchased revealed that it had been laced with the opioid fentanyl. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid and a prescription drug used as a pain killer. In recent years, it has caused numerous deaths when mixed with heroin and sold to unsuspecting drug users.

Established in 1967, the Market is one of the largest produce markets in the world. There are approximately 50 wholesale companies selling produce from all over the United States and many other countries. The Market is one of New York's great and unique institutions. Mayor Bill de Blasio, through the City's Economic Development Corporation, has started the process of rebuilding the Market's entire infrastructure to modernize its operations.

This investigation began when BIC's NYPD detective squad received information that some workers in the Market were part of a larger ring of criminals selling heroin in Hunts Point. As the Market's regulator, BIC was seriously concerned that drug sales were taking place inside the Markets, but even more concerned when the investigation revealed that some of the heroin sold contained fentanyl. Fentanyl is a particularly dangerous substance that should not be in or around fresh fruits and vegetables, or anything that could be ingested by people.

The drug sales occurred throughout the Market – in stairwells, bathroom stalls and nearby trucks. Neither the management of the Market nor its Public Safety Unit are equipped to stop these quick

drug transactions, given the massive size of the Market and the many secluded areas available to drug dealers. The sellers were only caught through the use of undercover investigators posing as drug buyers. BIC thanks the Market's Public Safety Unit for assisting in the arrests of some of these defendants. Investigations like this show how the overall wellbeing and safety of the City's public wholesale markets requires a cooperative effort between BIC and each of the markets' own safety teams.

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The produce market in Hunts Point is one of the largest public wholesale produce markets in the world and one of this City's great, unique institutions. BIC has been overseeing this and the other public wholesale food markets in the City since 2002. In addition to making sure that the companies operating within them are free from the influences of organized crime and other corrupt forces, BIC also works to protect the overall well-being of the markets themselves. Selling and using illegal drugs around the markets is dangerous enough, especially given that many large trucks and other motor vehicles are constantly operating in the area. When you add to this the fact that some of these drugs were laced with the dangerous opioid fentanyl, potentially exposing the public at large to harm, that causes even more alarm. BIC will continue working with other law enforcement agencies and the managers of the markets themselves when appropriate to ensure that New York City's public wholesale markets continue to thrive.

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