



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 14, 2020

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PRESS RELEASE

**SIX NEW YORK CITY CORRECTION OFFICERS AND 15 OTHERS CHARGED
WITH CONSPIRING TO ACCEPT BRIBES AND SMUGGLE CONTRABAND INTO
RIKERS ISLAND FACILITIES**

Illegal Narcotics and a Smart Phone Seized by Law Enforcement Officers

Three criminal complaints were unsealed today in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, charging 21 defendants with conspiring to bribe correction officers employed by the New York City Department of Corrections (“DOC”) as part of narcotics smuggling conspiracies. Three defendants remain at large. The initial appearances for 12 of the defendants are scheduled for this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Ramon E. Reyes, Jr.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, William F. Sweeney, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), and Margaret M. Garnett, Commissioner, New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), announced the charges.

“The corruption of correction officers presents a security risk to the entire jail population, and a potential danger to the residents of our communities,” stated United States Attorney Donoghue. “We will continue to aggressively investigate and prosecute those who place their personal enrichment over the public duties they have sworn to perform.” Mr. Donoghue thanked Homeland Security Investigations, New York, and the New York City Police Department for their assistance in the investigations.

“The correction officers charged today allegedly accepted bribes to sneak contraband onto Rikers Island—propagating behavior that has the potential to harm other officers and prisoners alike. The smuggling of contraband into our jails is a common Hollywood storyline, but while there’s an element of fiction in many a screenplay, there’s nothing fake about this real-life threat to our correctional facilities. Along with our partners at the DOI, we are dedicated to confronting this issue head-on,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Sweeney.

“Contraband smuggling enterprises have long plagued City jail facilities. The arrests today are another example of a pattern in which inmates and outside conspirators identify

correction officers vulnerable to corruption, and use them to carry drugs and other illegal substances into the jails,” stated DOI Commissioner Garnett. “These schemes threaten the safety of fellow officers and other inmates, and undermine order and discipline in the City’s jails. DOI will continue to prioritize safety and integrity in the jails, and continue to relentlessly pursue those who threaten it. DOI thanks its partners at the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York and the FBI for their partnership in the pursuit of these individuals charged today in our shared effort to root out criminal activity in the City’s correction system.”

Since early 2019, the FBI and DOI have been investigating contraband rings involving the payment and receipt of bribes by DOC officers in exchange for transporting marijuana, the narcotic Suboxone and K2 (a synthetic cannabinoid) and an unauthorized smart phone into the George R. Vierno Center and the Otis Bantum Correctional Center on Rikers Island.

As set forth in the complaints, the defendants conspired to smuggle the contraband into Rikers Island facilities with the assistance of New York City Correction Officers Darrington James, Patrick Legerme, Aldrin Livingston, Michael Murray, Angel Rodriguez and Christopher Walker. Defendants James Albert, Clarence Brooks, Kyle Charles, John Mohammed and Christopher Rivas, who were incarcerated for unrelated offenses, arranged for marijuana and other contraband to be packaged and secretly delivered to those correction officers by defendants Celena Burgess, Veronica Jagdeo, Jorcetta King, Aboudou Krigger, Jonathan Medina, Styles Shephard and Tony West. The defendant correction officers allegedly received thousands of dollars in bribes to smuggle the drugs past DOC security, for distribution inside the Rikers Island facilities.

As a part of their investigations, law enforcement officers reviewed financial records related to online money transfer tools, such as CashApp, conducted surveillance and reviewed recorded telephone calls made by defendants who used coded language in their conversations. For example, on February 19, 2019, an inmate at the Vierno facility called a co-conspirator to discuss supplying the inmate and Albert with marijuana: “I’m trying to get, um four ‘Oakland Raider jerseys’ [code for marijuana]. ‘...’Got Pink Panties’ [code for correction officer] on the line right now, you heard? Gangsta. You just gotta make it to the ‘Jungle’ [code for Brooklyn] to drop it off to them and, more or less, we lit from there.” In recorded telephone calls between Rivas and a co-conspirator in October 2019, Rivas requested a ‘joint’ [code for a cellular telephone] with a Facetime application. In a subsequent telephone conversation, Rivas asked West whether the joint is a Size 5 or Size 6 [code for iPhone 5 or iPhone 6], and West replied that it was a Size 6, referring to an iPhone 6 that was delivered to the Vierno facility the previous night.

On October 25, 2019, a DOC Special Search Team seized an iPhone 6 and an iPhone charger from Rivas’s laundry bag and 12 clear plastic bags containing marijuana from his person.

The charges in the complaint are allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted, the defendants each face a maximum sentence of five years’ imprisonment.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Public Integrity Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Nathan Reilly, Margaret Gandy, Drew Rolle, Alicia Washington and Virginia Nguyen are in charge of the prosecution.

The Defendants:

JAMES ALBERT
Age: 43
Comstock, New York

CLARENCE BROOKS
Age: 39
Bronx, New York

CELENA BURGESS
Age: 43
New York, New York

KYLE CHARLES
Age: 32
Brooklyn, New York

VERONICA JAGDEO
Age: 24
Freeport, New York

DARRINGTON JAMES
Age: 30
Queens, New York

JORCETTA KING
Age: 33
Bronx, New York

ABOUDOU KRIGGER
Age: 25
Bronx, New York

PATRICK LEGERME
Age: 29
Queens, New York

ALDRIN LIVINGSTON
Age: 31
Queens, New York

JONATHAN MEDINA
Age: 29
Queens, New York

JOHN MOHAMMED
Age: 27
Rome, New York

MICHAEL MURRAY
Age: 28
Brooklyn, New York

CHRISTOPHER RIVAS
Age: 32
New York, New York

ANGEL RODRIGUEZ
Age: 23
Bellport, New York

STYLES SHEPHARD
Age: 24
New York, New York

CHRISTOPHER WALKER
Age: 28
Brooklyn, New York

TONY WEST
Age: 24
Brooklyn, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket Nos.: 20-MJ-25; 20-MJ-26; and 20-MJ-31.