



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

ENFORCER FOR BROOKLYN-BASED "BULLY GANG" SENTENCED TO
52 YEARS IN PRISON

Franklin Gillespie Was a High-Ranking Member of the Gang, Responsible for
Murders, Robberies, and Drug Trafficking

Earlier today, in federal court in Brooklyn, Franklin Gillespie was sentenced by United States District Judge Brian M. Cogan to 52 years' imprisonment for multiple crimes related to his high-ranking membership of the Bully Gang, a violent street gang based in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. Among other serious crimes, Gillespie committed two murders, including the murder of a potential witness, as well as two armed robberies, while on supervised release for multiple federal firearms convictions.

Gillespie was one of four Bully Gang leaders and managers who were convicted after a 13-week trial in 2024, in a case that resulted in the arrest and conviction of 53 defendants. Gillespie's co-defendants at trial—Moeleek Harrell, Derrick Ayers, and Anthony Kennedy—were sentenced to 60 years' imprisonment in April 2026, 59 years' imprisonment in June 2026, and 41 years' imprisonment in May 2026, respectively. The trial defendants were convicted variously of racketeering, murder conspiracies, assaults, firearms offenses, drug trafficking offenses, and money laundering conspiracies. In connection with the racketeering conviction, a jury found several racketeering acts proven, including murder, murder conspiracy, robbery, bribery, drug trafficking conspiracy, and money laundering.

Joseph Nocella, Jr., United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; Bryan DiGirolamo, Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, New York Division (ATF); Jessica S. Tisch, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD); and Nadia I. Shihata, Commissioner, New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), announced the sentence.

"Franklin Gillespie was one of the most violent members of an extraordinarily violent street gang and our Brooklyn community is rid of him thanks to today's sentence," stated

United States Attorney Nocella. “This important prosecution demonstrates our Office’s commitment to seeking justice for Gillespie’s many victims and their families, and ensures that our communities will be protected in the future from the leaders of this violent criminal organization.”

Mr. Nocella thanked the United States Attorney’s Office in the District of Maine and the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency for their assistance during this investigation and prosecution.

“This sentence holds accountable a senior gang member whose actions brought violence, fear, and tragedy to our communities. From orchestrating violent criminal activity to committing multiple murders, armed robberies, the defendant demonstrated a complete disregard for human life and the rule of law. ATF/ NYPD Joint Firearms Task Force remains committed to working alongside the NYPD, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York, and our law enforcement partners to identify, investigate, and dismantle violent criminal organizations, ensuring those who terrorize our neighborhoods are brought to justice,” stated ATF Special Agent in Charge DiGirolamo.

“For years, the Bully Gang waged a campaign of violence and terror in Brooklyn, committing murders, shootings, armed robberies, and drug trafficking,” stated NYPD Commissioner Tisch. “Thanks to the tireless work of NYPD investigators and our law enforcement partners, Franklin Gillespie and the other top members of this ruthless gang will never walk free on our streets again. This case is yet another example of the NYPD’s precision policing strategy at work – going after the gangs and the guns to make our communities safer.”

“This sprawling investigation and today’s outcome have made the people of Brooklyn and beyond safer. With this sentence, Franklin Gillespie, one of four high-ranking gang leaders responsible for terrorizing neighborhoods by instilling fear, trafficking drugs, and committing murder, has been held accountable for his devastating conduct,” stated DOI Commissioner Shihata. “While this sentence cannot bring his victims back to their loved ones or undo the devastation his crimes have caused—it sends a clear message that those who endanger our communities will be brought to justice. I thank the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, the ATF’s New York Division and the NYPD for their partnership on this significant investigation.”

As proven during trial and set forth in court documents, the Bully Gang was a violent criminal organization whose members committed murders, including the murder of a potential law enforcement witness; regularly shot at gang rivals in public streets; burned down a home with people inside; committed armed robberies with an arsenal of weapons trafficked from out of state; and engaged in multiple sprawling narcotics trafficking schemes. Gillespie was the gang’s violent enforcer who targeted the gang’s enemies and committed multiple murders. Gillespie’s three co-defendants at trial also played critical roles in the gang: Harrell was a founder and leader who directed the gang’s crimes; Ayers ran the gang’s extensive Maine drug trafficking organization and committed numerous violent crimes for the gang, including murder; and Kennedy was a trusted member of the gang who participated in the murders carried out by Gillespie and the gang’s drug trafficking.

Crimes of Violence

Gillespie committed numerous acts of violence on behalf of the Bully Gang. Over four days in April 2020, Gillespie, with the assistance of Kennedy, murdered two people. First, Gillespie murdered Paul Hoilett in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Before the murder, Gillespie surveilled and followed Hoilett as Hoilett walked down the sidewalk. Gillespie then shot Hoilett in the back of the head at point-blank range. On the day of the murder, Kennedy drove Gillespie from New Jersey to Brooklyn, where Gillespie met Mike Hawley. Hawley then drove Gillespie directly to the murder.

Four days later, Gillespie and Kennedy murdered Hawley in Far Rockaway, Queens. After Gillespie and Kennedy came to believe that law enforcement was looking for Hawley, they targeted Hawley to prevent him from speaking to law enforcement authorities about Hoilett's murder. Kennedy drove Gillespie to and from Queens to commit this murder, while Gillespie arranged a meeting with Hawley in Queens under false pretenses. As with the murder of Hoilett, Gillespie shot Hawley multiple times, also at point-blank range. Gillespie and Kennedy took many steps to hide their involvement in this murder from law enforcement authorities, including removing the license plate and inspection sticker from the getaway car used in the murder.

In addition to these two murders, Gillespie committed many other violent crimes. In August 2020, Gillespie and other Bully Gang members and associates committed two gunpoint robberies on consecutive days in Manhattan. After the robberies, Gillespie and his co-conspirators made social media posts flaunting the proceeds of the robberies and bragging about their crimes. One week later, Gillespie was found with three guns, including the two guns used in these robberies.

Gillespie's violence was part of a larger pattern of violence among members of the Bully Gang. For example, in a shooting on October 1, 2017, Harrell, Ayers, and other gang members targeted a victim who the gang believed was responsible for the death of one of the Bully Gang's founders. During this shooting, their intended target and an innocent bystander were shot. Separately, Harrell, Ayers, and other gang members targeted their rival "Stukes Crew" in numerous acts of violence over several years. These acts of violence included Ayers's murder of Jonathan Jackson, a Stukes Crew associate, in March 2018. Harrell, Ayers, and other Bully Gang members also planned and participated in three additional shootings in Crown Heights targeting the Stukes Crew. One of these shootings resulted in a car crash that injured multiple people.

Notably, Gillespie is not alleged to have committed these 2017 and 2018 shootings because, from March 2016 through August 2019, he was in federal prison in connection with his second federal gun conviction. At the time of the murders and other conduct of which he was convicted in this case, Gillespie was on federal supervised release in connection with the federal firearms convictions.

Drug Trafficking

While still on federal supervised release, Gillespie also played an important role in the Bully Gang's drug trafficking operation in Maine. As part of this scheme, the Bully Gang and its associates transported large quantities of drugs, including cocaine base, heroin, and fentanyl, from New York and New Jersey to Maine, where they sold the drugs out of stash houses throughout the state. For months, Gillespie recruited and directed subordinates who sold and transported drugs, managed the gang's stash houses, traveled to Maine in connection with the scheme, and collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in profit from the drug sales. All of Gillespie's co-defendants at trial were also involved in the Maine drug trafficking scheme, including Ayers, who ran the day-to-day operations of the scheme for many years.

Other members and associates of the gang, including Harrell and Kennedy, ran a separate drug smuggling scheme at jail facilities on Rikers Island. In connection with this scheme, Harrell, Kennedy, and their co-conspirators arranged for comic books and other papers soaked in synthetic cannabinoids, also known as "K2," to be delivered to Rikers where the drugs were sold to inmates at a substantial profit.

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The government's case is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime and Gangs Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Nicholas J. Moscow, Lindsey R. Oken, Joy Lurinsky, Victor Zapana, and Stephen H. Petraeus, and former Assistant United States Attorneys Drew Rolle and Michael J. Castiglione, were in charge of the prosecution, with significant assistance from Legal Administrative Specialist Samantha Ward, Intelligence Analyst Eungee Hwang, and Law Enforcement Coordinator Specialist Herbert Martin, among others.

The Defendants:

DERRICK AYERS (also known as "Dee" and "Mel")
Age: 39
Rahway, New Jersey
(Sentenced to 59 years' imprisonment on June 18, 2026)

FRANKLIN GILLESPIE (also known as "Spazz" and "Frankie Gino")
Age: 35
Newark, New Jersey
(Sentenced to 52 years' imprisonment on July 22, 2026)

MOELEEK HARRELL (also known as "Moe Money")
Age: 36
Brooklyn, New York
(Sentenced to 60 years' imprisonment on April 30, 2026)

ANTHONY KENNEDY (also known as "Biggie")
Age: 40
Queens, New York
(Sentenced to 41 years' imprisonment on May 12, 2026)

E.D.N.Y. Docket Nos. 11-CR-371 (BMC), 16-CR-252 (BMC), 20-CR-239 (S-8) (BMC), 20-CR-240 (BMC), 25-CR-229 (BMC)

E.D.N.Y. Docket Nos. 20-CR-239 (S-8) (BMC) and 20-CR-240 (BMC)