

Acting A.G. Underwood Announces Convictions of All 16 Members of Violent Hudson Valley Narcotics Ring In “Operation Yellow Brick Road”

May 11, 2018

Defendants Will Be Sentenced For Conspiring To Purchase And Sell Heroin And Cocaine In Newburgh, Orange County, And Throughout New York State

Conviction Marks Latest in the SURGE Initiative’s Effort to Crack Down on Violent Drug Traffickers in Suburban And Upstate NY – Taking Over 300 Traffickers Off Streets Since April 2017

HUDSON VALLEY – Acting Attorney General Barbara D. Underwood today announced the guilty pleas of 16 defendants for their roles as members of a large, violent narcotics trafficking ring operating in Hudson Valley, NY. A collaborative investigation uncovered that the ring trafficked heroin and cocaine into Newburgh and elsewhere in Orange County for resale to hundreds of drug users on a daily basis. In addition to all defendants admitting to conspiring to purchase and sell heroin and cocaine throughout the state, several defendants also admitted to purchasing, possessing, and selling illegal firearms in furtherance of their narcotics distribution operation. As a result of their pleas, the defendants will be sentenced to significant state prison sentences, totaling over 100 years.

The investigation was dubbed “Operation Yellow Brick Road” partially due to ringleader Damion Jackson’s street name “Toe-Toe.” The takedown marked the eighth major drug bust since the launch of the SURGE Initiative in April 2017. The SURGE Initiative – which stands for Suburban and Upstate Response to the Growing Epidemic – aims to crackdown on New York’s growing, and often violent, heroin, opioid, and narcotics trafficking networks operating in upstate and suburban communities. In the past year, Operation Wrecking Ball, Operation Bricktown, Operation Un-Wise, Operation Gravy Train, Operation Bloodsport, Operating Pipeline, and Operation Dirty Deeds have resulted in 302 traffickers taken off the streets throughout New York State. Those defendants have collectively been charged with over 1,384 crimes.

“Following the one year anniversary of the SURGE initiative, we’ve taken over 300 drug traffickers off our streets,” said **Acting Attorney General Underwood**. “Disrupting illegal and violent trafficking rings is critical to protecting communities across the state and we will continue working with our partners in law enforcement to make every neighborhood safer.”

The 10 months-long investigation was led by the Attorney General’s Organized Crime Task Force (OCTF), in partnership with the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), City of Newburgh Police Department (CNPD), Orange County Drug Task Force (OCDTF), Orange County Sheriff’s Office (OCSO), and Orange County District Attorney’s Office (OCDA). The investigation relied on hundreds of hours of physical surveillance, wiretapping, hidden cameras, GPS devices, undercover agents, and cooperating witnesses. The investigation uncovered that the defendants acquired large amounts of narcotics from Paterson, NJ, and elsewhere, in order to re-sell them to individuals in Newburgh, elsewhere in Orange County, and throughout New York State. The investigation culminated with the arrest of 16 individuals on February 13, 2018, and resulted in the recovery of bulk heroin and cocaine, hundreds of doses of heroin in individual glassines, 1 kilo of methamphetamine, 49 pounds of marijuana, 3 handguns, 1 sawed-off shotgun, 1 shotgun, and over \$36,000 in cash.

Yesterday, the ring’s main cocaine supplier, Kennedy Richards, a.k.a. “Prezzy”, of Paterson, NJ, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the first degree (a class A-I felony) and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to up to 17 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision. The remaining defendants have all previously pled guilty and admitted their roles in the narcotics trafficking ring as follows:

- Damion Jackson, a.k.a. “Toe-Toe,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the second degree, criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree, and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to between 12 and 18 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Frederick Blue, a.k.a. “Fredo,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to two counts of criminal sale of a controlled substance in the second degree and conspiracy in the second degree. He was sentenced to 13 years in state prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Dwaine Tate, a.k.a. “Devil,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal possession of a controlled substance in the first degree and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to 10 years in prison followed by 5 years post-release supervision.
- Kevin Maldonado, a.k.a. “Kels,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree, criminal sale of a controlled substance in the second degree, and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to 10 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Steve Cohen, a.k.a. “Lonkie,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the second degree (a class A-II felony) and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to between 7 and 9 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Andrew Hutchinson, a.k.a. “Jimmy,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the second degree and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to 7 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Oneil Mitchell, a.k.a. “O,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to 5 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Adrian Hutchinson, a.k.a. “Travis,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to attempted criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to 4 ½ - 9 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Demetrius Kelly, a.k.a. “Meech,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree. He will be sentenced to 7 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Kenny Maldonado-Irizarry, a.k.a. “Ken Block,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal possession of a weapon in the third degree, criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree, and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to 5 years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.

- Monique Bentley, a.k.a. “Cola,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the second degree (a class A-II felony) and conspiracy in the second degree. She will be sentenced to 4 ½ years in prison followed by 5 years of post-release supervision.
- Tykwon Burks, a.k.a. “Chop,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to between 2 and 6 years in prison followed by 2 years of post-release supervision.
- Ethan Santana, a.k.a. “Edai,” of Newburgh, NY, pled guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree and conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to between 2 and 6 years in prison followed by 2 years of post-release supervision.
- John Boughton, of Poughkeepsie, NY, pled guilty to criminal possession of a controlled substance in the third degree and attempted conspiracy in the second degree. He will be sentenced to 6 months in jail followed by 5 years of probation.

All defendants pled guilty before Orange County Court Judge Craig Stephen Brown.

During their guilty pleas, Tate, Mitchell, Cohen, and Jackson, as well as Andrew and Adrian Hutchinson, all admitted to their roles as purchasers and distributors of large amounts of cocaine that were purchased from Richards and trafficked from Patterson, NJ to Orange County, NY. The investigation revealed that once the defendants obtained the cocaine, they would adulterate it with cutting agents such as baking soda to double their profits, or they would “cook” the powder cocaine into crack-cocaine. Tate and Andrew Hutchinson would then sell the cocaine to their own customers or to other members of the organization including Adrian Hutchinson, Jackson, and Mitchell, who admitted that they would then resell the cocaine to their own customers. Jackson and Cohen also admitted to selling both cocaine and heroin to their own customers, which included resellers such as Blue, Maldonado, and Boughton. Blue, Bentley, and Maldonado admitted to purchasing the heroin from Jackson and Cohen and then reselling the heroin to their own customers or to other co-conspirators including Santana, Burks, Kelly, and Maldonado-Irizarry, who likewise admitted that they resold heroin to their own customers.

In addition to selling narcotics, Blue, Maldonado, and Maldonado-Irizarry admitted to purchasing, selling, and possessing illegal firearms used for protection and enforcement of their narcotics operation. As part of their guilty pleas, Maldonado and Maldonado-Irizarry admitted to possessing three handguns, including a .32 caliber revolver and two .9mm pistols. Additionally, Maldonado admitted to selling a sawed-off shotgun, and both Maldonado and Blue admitted to illegally selling one shotgun.

The case is being prosecuted by OCTF Assistant Deputy Attorney General Shanon Nicholas LaCorte, under the supervision of OCTF Deputy Chief Diego Hernandez. Deputy Attorney General Peri Alyse Kadanoff runs the Organized Crime Task Force. The Criminal Justice Division is led by Executive Deputy Attorney General Margaret Garnett.