

Former Associate and Trap House Landlord of New Bedford Latin Kings Chapter Pleads Guilty to Racketeering and Drug Conspiracy

A former associate of the New Bedford Chapter of the Massachusetts Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (Latin Kings), and owner of multiple apartment buildings utilized by the Latin Kings, commonly referred to as “trap houses,” pleaded guilty yesterday to racketeering and drug charges.

Robert Avitabile, a/k/a “Bobby,” 41, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to conduct enterprise affairs through a pattern of racketeering activity, more commonly referred to as RICO conspiracy, and conspiracy to manufacture and distribute cocaine and cocaine base (crack cocaine). U.S. Senior District Court Judge Rya W. Zobel scheduled sentencing for Aug. 10, 2022.

The Latin Kings in New Bedford ran a vast cocaine base distribution network that used multi-unit apartment buildings known as “trap houses” to distribute narcotics. Members of the Latin Kings dealt drugs in the trap houses, obtaining their supply of crack cocaine from the Chapter leader, Jorge Rodriguez, a/k/a “King G.” As detailed in court filings in the case, evidence developed during the investigation included multiple recordings of Rodriguez cooking crack cocaine at the trap houses, directing violence against rival gang members, meting out discipline and handling firearms used to protect the Latin Kings’ drug distribution network.

Avitabile owned multiple apartment buildings in New Bedford

referred to as a “trap houses” and rented them to the Latin Kings, knowing that they would be used by the gang as locations where drugs would be dealt, and otherwise serve as centers of power for the gang. Despite the fact that police searched the rental units controlled by the Latin Kings dozens of times, Avitabile continued to rent the units to the gang. Court documents also described recordings and interceptions made of Avitabile coordinating with Jorge Rodriguez on arrangements including payment of rent by Latin Kings members, placement of Latin Kings members in certain apartment units and investment of Rodriguez’s drug proceeds into real estate.

Avitabile rented the apartment units to Latin Kings members, knowing that they would be used to sell, store and manufacture drugs. Through Avitabile’s association with the Latin Kings and Rodriguez, the Latin Kings used the apartment buildings to facilitate their campaign of street violence, drug dealing and otherwise control the neighborhood.

Pursuant to the terms of the plea agreement, Avitabile has agreed to forfeit proceeds from the sale of three apartment buildings in New Bedford, which were historically used by the Latin Kings.

In December 2019, a federal grand jury returned an indictment alleging racketeering conspiracy, drug conspiracy and firearms charges against 62 leaders, members and associates of the Latin Kings. Avitabile is the 57th defendant to plead guilty in the case.

The RICO conspiracy charge provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. Depending on the drug quantity, the drug trafficking conspiracy and distribution charges provide for a sentence of up to 20 years, 40 years or life in prison; a minimum of three, four or five years of supervised release; and fines of \$1 million, \$5 million and \$10 million. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the

U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts; Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; Commissioner Carol Mici of the Massachusetts Department of Correction; and New Bedford Police Chief Joseph C. Cordeiro made the announcement. Valuable assistance was also provided by the FBI North Shore Gang Task Force and the Bristol County and Suffolk County District Attorney's Offices. Assistant U.S. Attorney Philip A. Mallard of the Organized Crime & Gang Unit is prosecuting the case.

This effort is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.

The details contained in the charging documents are allegations. The remaining defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.