

Former Leader of New Bedford Latin Kings Chapter Pleads Guilty to Firearms Charges

A former leader of the New Bedford Chapter of the Massachusetts Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation ("Latin Kings") pleaded guilty on November 5 to firearms charges.

Damian Cornieles, a/k/a "Arnoldo Rodriguez," 25, pleaded guilty to being a felon in possession of firearms. U.S. District Court Judge William G. Young scheduled sentencing for March 4, 2021. Cornieles was charged in December 2019, following the execution of a search warrant at his residence during which multiple firearms were recovered. At the time of the search, Cornieles was a member of the New Bedford Chapter of 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. Twenty of the Latin Kings leaders and members charged in that indictment have pleaded guilty.

As part of the operation, a search warrant was executed at Cornieles' New Bedford residence, during which six firearms and ammunition were recovered. Following the search, Cornieles was charged separately. According to court documents, Cornieles was previously convicted of a felony and is therefore prohibited from lawfully possessing firearms. During today's plea hearing, Cornieles admitted to being a member of the Latin Kings and a former leader of the gang. He also admitted that he stored the six firearms on behalf of the New Bedford Chapter of the Latin Kings.

The Latin Kings are a violent criminal enterprise comprised of thousands of members across the United States. The Latin Kings

adhere to a national manifesto, employ an internal judiciary and use a sophisticated system of communication to maintain the hierarchy of the organization. As alleged in court documents, the gang uses drug distribution to generate revenue, and engages in violence against witnesses and rival gangs to further its influence and to protect its turf.

The charge of being a felon in possession of a firearm provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000. 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. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

United States Attorney Andrew E. Lelling; Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Field Division; Commissioner Carol Mici of the Massachusetts Department of Correction; and New Bedford Police Chief Joseph C. Cordeiro made the announcement today. 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. Attorneys Philip A. Mallard, Mark Grady and Lauren Graber of Lelling's Criminal Division are prosecuting the case.

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.

The operation was conducted by a multi-agency task force through the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), a partnership between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. The principal mission of the OCDETF program is to identify, disrupt and dismantle the most serious drug trafficking, weapons trafficking and money laundering

organizations, and those primarily responsible for the nation's illegal drug supply. More information on the OCDETF program is available here:
<https://www.justice.gov/ocdetf/about-ocdetf>.