

# **Leader of Latin Kings pleads guilty in connection with alleged cocaine distribution ring from Rhode Island to New Bedford**

A leader of the Rhode Island Chapter of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation ("Latin Kings") pleaded guilty yesterday to conspiracy charges.

Eric Thomas a/k/a "King E," 46, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute cocaine. U.S. Senior District Court Judge Rya W. Zobel scheduled sentencing for Dec. 8, 2020. Thomas was arrested and charged in December 2019, at which time he had been identified as the leader of the Rhode Island Chapter of the Latin Kings.

During the plea proceedings, Thomas admitted that in August 2019, he conspired with others to purchase cocaine from members of the Latin Kings in New Bedford for resale. Days later, on Sept. 4, 2019, a co-conspirator was captured in a video recording purchasing 186 grams of cocaine from members of the New Bedford Chapter in a deal facilitated by Thomas.

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 conspiracy charge provides for a sentence of up to 20

years in prison, at least three years and up to life of supervised release and a fine of up to \$1 million. 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 Worcester Police Chief Steven M. Sargent 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. Attorney Philip A. Mallard and Mark Grady 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.