

Massachusetts leader of Dark Web Drug Trafficking operation sentenced to prison, 59 Bitcoin in forfeiture

Investigation seized over 19 kilograms of MDMA, more than 10,000 counterfeit Xanax pills, approximately seven kilograms of Ketamine and nearly one kilogram of cocaine.

The leader and organizer of a highly sophisticated drug trafficking operation was sentenced yesterday in federal court in Boston for manufacturing and distributing a multitude of controlled substances using the Dark Web.

Binh Thanh Le, 25, of Brockton, was sentenced by U.S. Senior District Court Judge Rya W. Zobel to eight years in prison and three years of supervised release. Le was also ordered to forfeit more than 59 Bitcoin (currently worth in excess of \$2 million), \$114,680 in cash, \$42,390 representing the proceeds from the sale of a 2018 BMW M3, along with other items including a pill press and currency counter. On Sept. 29, 2021, Le pleaded guilty to conspiracy to manufacture, distribute and possess with intent to distribute Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), commonly known as ecstasy, Ketamine and Alprazolam (Xanax).

This sentence marks the first judicial forfeiture of cryptocurrency in the District of Massachusetts.

“The Dark Web is a rising threat to our communities and must be taken very seriously. Anonymous networks open the door for people, including our children, to order deadly amounts of illegal narcotics from anywhere in the world and have them

delivered to their doorsteps. Le took advantage of this – at only 22-years-old, he used the Dark Web to organize a complex drug distribution operation that reached a nationwide customer base and an international network of suppliers,” said United States Attorney Rachael S. Rollins. “This sentence sends a clear message to Dark Web criminals: the federal government is entering this space. We will find you and you will be held accountable. Thanks to the incredible work of our law enforcement colleagues, there is one less cybercriminal hiding in the shadows.”

“When the U.S. Mail system is unwittingly used to transport illegal narcotics it is taken very seriously,” said Inspector in Charge Ketty Larco-Ward of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service’s Boston Division. “The sentence imposed today on Binh Thanh Le should give fair warning that Postal Inspectors will identify and seek prosecution of those individuals involved in dark web illegal commerce. The Postal Inspection Service is continuously working to disrupt and dismantle the underground marketplace and enhance its ability to prevent and combat criminal activity.”

“Le attempted to use the Dark Web to conceal his drug trafficking business, using its assumed anonymity to distribute dangerous drugs throughout the United States and reap a generous profit,” said Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge for the Homeland Security Investigations’ Boston Field Office. “This sentence shows that crimes conducted in the cyber realm have very real, very significant consequences. HSI is proud of our partnership with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and stands ready to assist our federal, state and local partners in thwarting crimes like these.”

“This was a very long and complex investigation that involved a lot of help and assistance from multiple agencies including the United States Postal Service, the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Stoughton Police and the Massachusetts State Police assigned

to the Norfolk District Attorney's Office," said Norfolk County District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey. "Hundreds of hours of investigative work shut down a significant drug operation that was supplying club drugs through sales on the dark web. This is a great example of law enforcement partners working together to keep people safe."

Le was indicted in June 2019 along with co-conspirators Steven McCall and Allante Pires. According to court records, Le received wholesale quantities of controlled substances in the mail from various international sources. Le and, allegedly, his co-conspirators then processed and manufactured those controlled substances at an office space Le rented in Stoughton. To distribute the drugs, Le created and operated a vendor site called "EastSideHigh" in markets on the Dark Network, more commonly known as the Dark Web. The Dark Web is any portion of the internet that can only be accessed with specific software, configurations or authorization that anonymize internet traffic. Le used these Dark Web markets to advertise various drugs for sale, including cocaine, MDMA, Ketamine and Xanax. After receiving the orders and payment via Bitcoin, Le and, allegedly, others mailed the drugs to customers throughout the United States.

On March 27, 2019, Le met with undercover law enforcement officers at a hotel in Norwood to exchange \$200,000 worth of Bitcoin for cash. Le was arrested after he transferred the Bitcoin to the agents.

Over 19 kilograms of MDMA, almost seven kilograms of Ketamine, nearly one kilogram of cocaine and more than 10,000 counterfeit Xanax pills were seized by authorities during the investigation. Investigators also recovered a computer with the "EastSideHigh" vendor page open, numerous packages containing MDMA and Ketamine, various shipping and packaging materials and a pill press from the office space in Stoughton.

U.S. Attorney Rollins; USPIS INC Larco-Ward; HSI SAC

Millhollin; Norfolk DA Morrissey; Colonel Christopher Mason, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police; and Jennifer De La O, Director of Field Operations of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Boston Field Office, made the announcement. Special assistance with the investigation was provided by the Homeland Security Investigations in Colorado; Postal Inspectors from around the country; and the Stoughton, Norwood, and Brockton Police Departments. Assistant U.S. Attorney James E. Arnold of Rollins' Narcotics & Money Laundering Unit prosecuted the case and Assistant U.S. Attorney Carol E. Head, Chief of Rollins' Asset Recovery Unit, handled the forfeiture.

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.