

Massachusetts woman pleads guilty to role in counterfeit Fentanyl pill trafficking organization

Defendant trafficked 30 kilograms of Fentanyl manufactured to resemble prescription pills.

A Lynn woman pleaded guilty today in federal court in Boston to her role in a large-scale drug trafficking organization that manufactured and distributed hundreds of thousands of counterfeit Percocet pills containing fentanyl.

Laurie Caruso, 51, pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiracy to manufacture, distribute and possess with intent to distribute fentanyl and other controlled substances. U.S. District Court Judge Nathaniel Gorton scheduled sentencing for June 29, 2022. On June 30, 2021, Laurie Caruso was arrested and charged along with co-conspirators Vincent Caruso, Ernest Johnson and Nicole Benton.

According to the charging documents, Laurie Caruso was a member of a large drug trafficking organization (DT0) operated by her son, Vincent Caruso, a self-admitted Crip gang member, that included Johnson and Benton, among others. The DT0 allegedly sold counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl – produced using multiple large pill presses capable of generating thousands of pills per hour – to street gangs for further distribution on the North Shore of Massachusetts. A single counterfeit fentanyl pill allegedly retails between \$10-\$20, thereby generating millions of dollars in retails sales.

Laurie Caruso admitted to being a primary distributor for the DT0, which historically manufactured its own counterfeit

fentanyl pills when it was based in Saugus. As described during today's hearing, after interdiction by law enforcement, the DTO outsourced its manufacturing, and would receive deliveries of large quantities of fentanyl pills manufactured in Rhode Island. Once delivered, the DTO would repackage and distribute those pills for sale locally in communities North of Boston. Laurie Caruso admitted to trafficking over 30 kilograms of fentanyl, sold in the form of hundreds of thousands of counterfeit Percocet pills containing pressed fentanyl. As part of her plea agreement, Laurie Caruso also agreed to forfeit over \$100,000 in cash seized from the DTO that were the proceeds of drug trafficking.

On Sept. 30, 2021, Benton pleaded guilty to conspiracy to manufacture, distribute and possess with intent to distribute fentanyl and other controlled substances and to possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking conspiracy. Vincent Caruso and Johnson have pleaded not guilty. Vincent Caruso was recently indicted on Jan. 19, 2022, for his role in the conspiracy and faces additional charges.

The charge of conspiracy to manufacture, distribute, and possess with intent to distribute, fentanyl provides for mandatory sentences of five or 10 years, and maximum penalties of up to 40 years or life in prison, depending on drug weight, up to a lifetime of supervised release and a fine of up to \$10 million. Sentences are imposed by a federal district judge based on the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

First Assistant United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy: Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; James Ferguson, Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Boston Division; and Colonel Christopher Mason, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police made the announcement today. Assistance was provided by the Essex, Middlesex and Suffolk County District Attorneys' Offices;

Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk and Hancock (Maine) County Sheriffs' Departments; U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maine; Maine Drug Enforcement Agency; and the Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea, Danvers, Everett, Lynn, Malden, Salem, Saugus, Somerville, Revere, Bolton (Maine), Bangor (Maine), Portland (Maine) and Westbrook (Maine) Police Departments. Assistant U.S. Attorney Philip A. Mallard of the Organized Crime & Gang Unit is prosecuting the case.

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>.

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.