

Six men charged with major interstate gun trafficking including four from New Bedford and Wareham

Defendants Allegedly Transported Guns from Florida and Michigan to Sell in Massachusetts; Investigation also Uncovered Drug Trafficking and Illegal Firearms.

Six men have been indicted in connection with a major interstate gun trafficking operation after a joint state, federal, and local investigation led by Attorney General Maura Healey's Office.

The investigation was led by Massachusetts State Police assigned to the AG's Office, in collaboration with MSP's Gang Unit, MSP's Troop D Community Action Team, the Bristol County State Police Detectives Unit and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). The investigation revealed that the defendants were allegedly conspiring to transport firearms into Massachusetts from out of state, specifically from Florida and Michigan. During the course of the investigation, the AG's Office also uncovered evidence of heroin and cocaine trafficking.

A Statewide Grand Jury returned indictments against the following individuals last week:

James Benassi, age 33, of New Bedford

Trafficking a Firearm (1 count)

Conspiracy to Transport a Firearm into the Commonwealth (1 count)

Carrying a Firearm (2 counts)

Possession of a Firearm (1 count)

Possession of Large Capacity Feeding Device (3 counts)
Improper Storage of a Firearm (1 count)
Possession of Ammunition (3 counts)
Intimidation of a Witness (1 count)
Trafficking in Heroin, more than 100g (1 count)
Trafficking in Cocaine, more than 100g (1 count)
Possession with Intent to Distribute Class E (1 count)

Justin Pena, age 33, of New Bedford

Possession of a Firearm (1 count)
Possession of Large Capacity Feeding Device (1 count)
Improper Storage of a Firearm (1 count)
Possession of Ammunition (2 counts)
Trafficking in Heroin, more than 100g (1 count)
Trafficking in Cocaine, more than 100g (1 count)
Possession with Intent to Distribute Class E (1 count)

Mathew Capozzi, age 37, of West Wareham

Conspiracy to Transport a Firearm into the Commonwealth (1 count)

Nicholas Ieronimo, age 33, of West Wareham

Conspiracy to Transport a Firearm into the Commonwealth (1 count)

Donald Ashcraft, age 38, of North Port, Florida

Transporting a Firearm into the Commonwealth (8 counts)
Trafficking a Firearm (1 count)
Conspiracy to Transport a Firearm into the Commonwealth (1 count)
Carrying a Firearm (7 counts)
Carrying a Loaded Firearm (1 count)
Possession of Large Capacity Feeding Device (8 counts)
Possession of Ammunition (6 counts)
Possession Class B (2 counts)
Possession Class E (1 count)

Craig Baier, age 39, of Bradenton, Florida

Transporting a Firearm into the Commonwealth (8 counts)

Trafficking a Firearm (1 count)

Conspiracy to Transport a Firearm into the Commonwealth (1 count)

Carrying a Firearm (7 counts)

Carrying a Loaded Firearm (1 count)

Possession of Large Capacity Feeding Device (8 counts)

Possession of Ammunition (6 counts)

Possession Class B (2 counts)

Possession Class E (1 count)

The defendants will be arraigned in Bristol and Plymouth Superior Courts on dates to be determined.

The AG's Office alleges that Ashcraft and Baier transported numerous firearms across state lines, and that Benassi, Capozzi, and Ieronimo conspired with them to do so. Ashcraft, Baier, and Benassi are also each alleged to have trafficked a firearm. Baier and Ashcraft were arrested on July 28, 2020 with seven firearms in their possession, as well as ammunition and large capacity magazines. Subsequent investigation resulted in the coordinated execution of search warrants on August 20, 2020 at five locations, including Benassi and Pena's residence, where investigators located two firearms, a large capacity magazine, ammunition and approximately 170 grams of cocaine. After continued investigation, investigators identified an additional location associated with Benassi, and on September 9, 2020 searched and discovered two more firearms, ammunition, a large capacity magazine, and approximately 118 grams of heroin/fentanyl for which Benassi and Pena face charges.

These charges are allegations, and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

This matter is being handled by Assistant Attorneys General

Kaitlyn O'Leary and Caitlin McDermott of the AG's Enterprise, Major and Cyber Crimes Division and was investigated by Massachusetts State Police assigned to the AG's Office, in collaboration with MSP's Gang Unit, MSP's Troop D Community Action Team, the Bristol County State Police Detectives Unit and ATF.