

Operation High Stakes: long-term investigation into the distribution of heroin, fentanyl in New Bedford area

On June 16, 2017, a task force of law enforcement agencies completed a long-term investigation into the distribution of heroin and fentanyl by a drug distribution organization operating in the New Bedford area. The investigation was dubbed "Operation High Stakes" and it resulted in charges against 21 individuals and the seizure of approximately 400 grams of heroin and fentanyl and a large amount of US Currency believed to be the proceeds of illegal drug sales.

The conclusion of Operation High Stakes marks the end of the second long-term investigation into heroin and fentanyl distribution organizations in the SouthCoast over the past two months. In May, State Police Detectives, Fall River Police Detectives and the Bristol County Sheriff's Office worked in conjunction with the Providence Police and the Rhode Island Attorney General resulting in the prosecution of more than thirty individuals in Rhode Island, many of whom were buying their drugs in Rhode Island and selling them in the Fall River area.

Both of these recent investigations were supported by the Office of Governor Charlie Baker and the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) through funding designated for opiate investigations in municipalities that have been hard hit by opiate related overdoses.

Bristol District Attorney Tom Quinn stated that, "[T]his is another example of law enforcement agencies working together to investigate drug dealing activity that fuels 'the opiate

epidemic.' Investigating and prosecuting drug dealers must be done to disrupt and reduce the flow of these lethal drugs into our communities. I want to specially thank the Governor's Office for funding this operation and all of the investigators for their efforts."

In June of 2016, investigators from the State Police Detective Unit assigned to the Bristol County District Attorney's Office, the New Bedford Police Department Gang and Narcotic Investigation Units, agents from Homeland Security Investigations, the Bristol County Sheriff's Office, and analysts from the Army National Guard and State Police Fusion Center began an investigation into the Drug Trafficking Organization.

Operation High Stakes focused on the activities of Steven Ortiz, age 36, his brother, Tommy Ortiz, age 35 and Jason DaRosa, age 33. These individuals are alleged to have directed a well-organized and disciplined group of individuals engaged in a joint enterprise to distribute heroin and fentanyl to local drug dealers in the Greater New Bedford area. The investigation revealed that the members of this organization sold heroin and fentanyl to local drug distributors who then supplied their customers, street-level heroin users, with the illegal and all too often, deadly drugs.

The investigation included the interception of thousands of communications on four different phone lines associated with the organization. As a result, investigators identified many individuals involved in the alleged criminal enterprise, including alleged drug distributors, drug couriers, money couriers, drug customers, and other co-conspirators.

The investigation resulted in the arrest of Steven Ortiz along with three others on June 7, 2017 and the seizure of approximately 265 grams of heroin.

Sixteen arrest warrants, and two search warrants were later

executed in the City of New Bedford resulting in the seizure of additional heroin, fentanyl and marijuana intended for street-level distribution. Three individuals charged in connection with this organization were on release pending prosecution for prior drug offenses. Eighteen people charged in this case reside and operate in the New Bedford area, two individuals reside on Cape Cod and one resides in Rhode Island. One suspect, Theresa Seales has not yet been apprehended. The following individuals have been charged in connection with the investigation:

1. Steven Ortiz, DOB: 06-07-81
2. Tommy Ortiz, DOB: 08-30-82
3. Jason Darosa, DOB: 11-19-84
4. Andrew Talavera, DOB: 12-12-92
5. Natasha Correia, DOB: 03-21-71
6. Antonio Vertentes, DOB: 02-24-85
7. Ricardo Rosario, DOB: 06-29-59
8. Kyle Taylor, DOB: 04-20-86
9. Jose Sanches, DOB: 02-11-74
10. Chad Dargis, DOB: 06-29-79
11. Claude Lague, DOB: 05-20-88
12. Crystal Hinson, DOB: 09-03-82
13. Carlos Dutra, DOB: 05-16-66
14. Krystel Mikina, DOB: 04-05-82
15. Katherine Espinal-Paredes, DOB: 02-08-89
16. Carly Medeiros, DOB: 09-30-90
17. Hector Vasquez, DOB: 06-17-67
18. Rashad Beiruti, DOB: 07-27-89
19. Leslie Cajuda, DOB: 08-13-84
20. Pedro Fuentes, DOB: 05-09-91
21. Theresa Seales, DOB: 10-03-83

The investigation is ongoing at this time with the potential of more charges being brought at a later time.