

East St. Louis Man Hit With Nearly 20 Years in Prison for Running Drugs, Keeping Guns, While on Supervised Release

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EAST ST. LOUIS – On Wednesday, United States District Judge Staci M. Yandle sentenced James T. Keel, 31, of East St. Louis to 210 months in prison, to run consecutively to the 27.5-month sentence he had already received back in February for violating the terms of his supervised release.

Re-offending in the federal system has cost the East St. Louis resident almost two decades of his life behind bars. In 2017, Keel was out on federal supervised release when he was caught selling cocaine from a house in East St. Louis.

Keel was originally prosecuted in 2012 for being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm and possession with intent to distribute 30 grams of crack cocaine. He was convicted and sentenced to 70 months in June 2012 and began serving a term of supervised release in May 2016. In September and October 2017, undercover agents working with the Metropolitan Enforcement Group of Southern Illinois (MEGSI) and the St. Clair County Sheriff's Office purchased crack cocaine from Keel on four occasions. Agents then served a search warrant on the residence and recovered 95 grams of powder cocaine, 64 grams of crack cocaine, 7 firearms, and over \$17,000 in cash. It was later determined that Keel had been selling drugs out of the house for over 9 months before he was caught.

In handing down the 17.5-year sentence, Judge Yandle emphasized the need to protect the public from Keel and deter others who are part of the ongoing drug epidemic plaguing our society. Keel testified at his sentencing hearing that he hadn't sold as much cocaine as the agents claimed, but Judge Yandle found his testimony "disingenuous" as it contradicted what he told investigators during a videotaped interview. Judge Yandle further pointed to the number of guns Keel illegally kept in the house where he was selling cocaine, as well as the length of time he had been selling drugs. It was clear, she said, that Keel had not learned anything from his previous stint in prison.

Keel pleaded guilty to the charges in August 2018. As part of his sentence, he was ordered to serve an additional 10 years of supervised release when his prison term ends.

This case was investigated by the St. Clair County Sheriff's Office, MEGSI, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives. Assistant United States Attorney Christopher Hoell prosecuted the case.