

Fugitive Drug Trafficker Sentenced to 13 Years in Federal Prison

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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BENTON – Mario L. Delgado-Lopez, 42, originally from Puerto Rico, was sentenced to 13 years in federal prison by a U.S. District judge on Nov. 9, 2023.

Lopez was apprehended after a four-year manhunt by federal law enforcement officials.

Lopez appeared in court for his sentencing hearing on Nov. 9, 2023, after previously pleading guilty to conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, possession of heroin with intent to distribute and possession of fentanyl with intent to distribute in 2018.

“The defendant was responsible for trafficking large amounts of illicit narcotics into southern Illinois and then fled the country,” said U.S. Attorney Rachelle A. Crowe. “As a fugitive of justice for several years, this federal prison sentence is appropriate for his conduct.”

According to court documents, Delgado-Lopez admitted to federal charges for conspiring with codefendants to distribute more than 850 grams of fentanyl and more than 550 grams of heroin in Madison and St. Clair counties.

Collinsville police arrested Delgado-Lopez following a traffic stop in August 2015 when officers discovered drugs in the vehicle. “The Drug Enforcement Administration and its law enforcement partners, to include the U.S. Marshals and the Collinsville Police Department, will stop at nothing to hold those who peddle poison in our communities accountable for their crimes,” said Assistant Special Agent in Charge Joseph Dixon, head of DEA investigations in southern Illinois.

“We will ensure these criminals spend time behind bars and no longer endanger the lives of our family, friends and community.” Delgado-Lopez’s sentencing hearing was previously scheduled for May 8, 2019, but he failed to appear in court. Mexican authorities arrested him in June on a federal warrant and transferred him to U.S. border officials. The judge upheld a sentencing enhancement for his obstructing justice due to absconding and being a fugitive.

Following imprisonment, Delgado-Lopez will serve five years of supervised release. DEA led the investigation with support from the U.S. Marshals Service and the Collinsville Police Department.

Assistant U.S. Attorney John Trippi prosecuted the case. This case was part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach.