

Eleven Indicted on Federal Drug Trafficking, Money Laundering Charges

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EAST ST. LOUIS – A federal grand jury in East St. Louis returned a seven-count indictment charging eleven individuals in a conspiracy to distribute large quantities of fentanyl, meth and cocaine in southern Illinois and across the country.

Granite City individual is on the list.

The indictment charges: Rogelio Martinez-Becerra, also known as “Rodrigo” or “Chaparro” (Shorty), 35, of St. Louis; Jose Manuel Garcia-Ramirez, also known as “Panzon” (Potbellied), 34, of Bakersfield, California; Ricardo Lopez, also known as “Ricardito”, 35, of St. Louis; Gustavo Torres-Yerena, also known as “Ojos verdes” (Green eyes), 60, of San Bernadino, California; Oscar Daniel Barajas-Lopez, also known as “Danny”, 21, of O’Fallon, Missouri; Jaime Barajas, 40, of O’Fallon, Missouri; Dary Axel Amaya-Gomez, also known as “Colombiano”, 31, of Bridgeton, Missouri; Deangelo Barnes, also known as “Lentes” (Glasses), 37, of Florissant, Missouri; David Howard, also known as “Siete” (Seven), 52, of Florissant, Missouri; Carolina Lopez-Hinojosa, also known as “La Morena”, 39, of Granite City, Illinois; and Monica Chavez, 26, of O’Fallon, Missouri.

“Law enforcement agencies and the U.S. Attorney’s Office will continue to work together to dismember organized crime rings responsible for distributing drugs and wreaking havoc in our communities,” said U.S. Attorney Rachelle Aud Crowe. According to court documents, the drug conspiracy involved an organized effort to distribute more than 400 grams of fentanyl, five kilograms of cocaine and 50 grams of methamphetamine from at least August 2022 to December 2023 in Madison and St. Clair counties. Martinez-Becerra, Barajas-Lopez and Chavez are also accused of distributing more than 50 grams of methamphetamine in Madison County in April 2023.

“Let me be clear: when it comes to protecting our communities against poly-drug trafficking organizations, there are no boundaries, no safe havens and no stones left unturned when you supply deadly drugs,” said Assistant Special Agent in Charge Joseph Dixon, head of Drug Enforcement Administration investigations in southern Illinois. “DEA and our law enforcement partners will stop at nothing and relentlessly pursue those responsible who distribute the powerfully addictive combination of fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamine. With this action, we intend to serve warning to other drug dealers to stay out of our communities or be prosecuted for their actions.”

The indictment also charged Martinez-Becerra, Garcia-Ramirez, Barajas-Lopez, Amaya-Gomez, Barnes and Lopez-Hinojosa with international money laundering conspiracy for allegedly transferring funds from Illinois to Mexico to promote the drug trafficking enterprise. “Money laundering fuels drug trafficking as it enables criminals to manipulate our financial systems and hide the immense amount of harm their activities cause,” said Special Agent in Charge Thomas F. Murdock, St. Louis Field Office.

In addition, Martinez-Becerra is facing three counts of international money laundering for allegedly wiring more than \$7,000 from Collinsville, Illinois, to various locations in Mexico from May through July 2023. Hinojosa is also accused of conducting

international money laundering by sending more than \$2,000 from Collinsville, Illinois, to Sinaloa, Mexico, in July 2023. Nine of the eleven indicted defendants have been arrested and are scheduled to stand trial at the federal courthouse in East St. Louis. An indictment is merely a formal charge against a defendant. Under the law, a defendant is presumed to be innocent of a charge until proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt to the satisfaction of a jury. Agents with DEA and IRS Criminal Investigation contributed to the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Quinley is prosecuting 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.