

Boston Pizzeria owner convicted of forced labor, assaulting employees, reporting workers to ICE

Defendant physically abused and threatened six employees for nearly a decade.

“BOSTON – The owner of Stash’s Pizza, a pizzeria chain in Massachusetts, was convicted today following a nine-day jury trial of forced labor charges. The defendant forced or attempted to force six victims to work for him and comply with excessive workplace demands through violent physical abuse; threats of violence and serious harm; and repeated threats to report the victims to immigration authorities for deportation.

Stavros Papantoniadis, a/k/a “Steve Papantoniadis,” 48, of Westwood, Mass., was convicted of three counts of forced labor and three counts of attempted forced labor. Chief U.S. District Judge F. Dennis Saylor IV scheduled sentencing for Sept. 12, 2024, at 11:00 a.m. Papantoniadis has remained in custody since his arrest on March 16, 2023.

“Today’s guilty verdict sends a powerful message to abusive employers that exploiting employees through fear and intimidation will never be tolerated. I hope that this verdict also alerts others who may be victims of exploitation and harm by employers, that the federal government will not sit idly by.

We will vigorously investigate and prosecute any employer who thinks they are above the law and physically and mentally abuses employees, withholds wages due, or threatens and intimidates workers,” said Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy. “Mr. Papantoniadis preyed on the desperation

of those without immigration status, subjecting them to violence and threats of deportation.

Forced labor is a serious violation of human rights, and no one in the United States should live in fear of abuse and coercion in their workplace. I commend the tireless efforts of our law enforcement partners who worked collaboratively to bring this defendant to justice.”

Papantoniadis forced or attempted to force five men and one woman to work for him through violent physical abuse, threats of abuse, and repeated threats to report victims to immigration authorities to have them deported. According to evidence introduced at trial, Papantoniadis thinly staffed his pizza shops, and purposely employed workers without immigration status to work behind the scenes, for 14 or more hours per day and as many as seven days per week. To maintain control of those undocumented workers, he made them believe that he would physically harm them or have them deported. He monitored the workers with surveillance cameras, which he accessed from his cell phone, and constantly demeaned, insulted and harassed them. When Papantoniadis learned that one victim planned to quit, he violently choked him, causing that victim to flee the pizza shop and run to safety in the parking lot. When other victims separately expressed their intentions to quit, Papantoniadis told one victim that he would kill him and call immigration authorities; and he threatened another worker by telling him he knew where the victim lived. When another worker tried to leave and drive away from one of Papantoniadis' pizza shops, Papantoniadis chased the victim down Route 1 in Norwood, Mass., and falsely reported the victim to the local police in an effort to pressure the victim to return to work at the pizza shop.

“Stavros Papantoniadis instilled fear in his employees. He underpaid and threatened them, some with fear of arrest and many with physical abuse. Today, the jury saw the indignities his employees were subjected to and have found Papantoniadis

guilty of forced labor violations,” said Michael J. Krol, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England. “Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect – especially those who place their trust in their employer. HSI is committed to ensuring those who violate forced labor laws are held accountable and brought to justice.”

“The jury’s verdict affirms the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General’s commitment to prioritize and investigate allegations of labor trafficking by individuals who enrich themselves through coercion or force. Stavros Papantoniadis used threats of arrest, deportation, reprisals, and physical violence to ensure his employees continued to work for wages lower than required by the Fair Labor Standards Act. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to aggressively investigate those who engage in labor trafficking,” said Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent-in-Charge, Northeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

Papantoniadis is the owner and operator of Stash’s Pizza, a chain of pizzerias which has locations in Dorchester and Roslindale, and previously had pizzerias in Norwood, Norwell, Randolph (d/b/a Boston Pizza Company), Weymouth (d/b/a Pacini’s Italian Eatery), and Wareham, Mass.

The charges of forced labor and attempted forced labor each provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to five years of supervised release, a fine of up to \$250,000, and restitution. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

Members of the public who believe they are a victim of labor trafficking or have information about labor trafficking, please call 888-221-6023, Option 5 or send an email with

contact information to USAMA.VictimAssistance@usdoj.gov.

Acting U.S. Attorney Levy, HSI SAC Krol and DOL-OIG SAC Mellone made the announcement today. Assistance was provided by the Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, the Boston Police Department, and the Norwood Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Timothy E. Moran, Chief of the Organized Crime & Gang Unit, and Brian A. Fogerty of the Civil Rights & Human Trafficking Unit are prosecuting the case.”-
Massachusetts Department of Justice.