

Massachusetts State Police task force takes down large drug trafficking ring

“A lengthy drug trafficking and firearms investigation in western Massachusetts by a regional State Police task force and partner agencies culminated last month with eight arrests and the seizure of multiple kilograms of fentanyl and cocaine, three firearms, and more than \$100,000 in suspected drug sale proceeds. The joint operation dismantled a major narcotics trafficking ring.

The investigation into the drug trafficking organization, which was supplying heroin and fentanyl in Hampden County, was begun in 2022 by the West Unit of the State Police Commonwealth Interstate Narcotics Reduction Enforcement Team (CINRET-West). The suppliers were selling heroin, much of which field-tested positive for fentanyl, in the Springfield area.



“Massachusetts State Police photo.

In total, Troopers, Officers, and Agents seized approximately 9.5 kilograms of suspected cocaine; 2.3 kilograms of a narcotic packaged as heroin – much which was field tested and determined to actually be fentanyl – packed into 111,200 individual small baggies; 28 grams of suspected fentanyl pills; 18 pounds of marijuana; approximately \$104,000 in US currency; six motor vehicles associated with the drug organization operations; and three handguns: a Browning 1911 .380 caliber with ammunition, a loaded SCCY CPX-2, and a loaded Smith and Wesson .357 Magnum.

Field tests of most samples of the seized narcotics billed as heroin revealed the content to be the more powerful fentanyl, the synthetic narcotic that has become the more prevalent opiate seen in street-level distribution in Massachusetts.

The State Police CINRET-West unit is comprised of State Troopers and members of the Springfield, Holyoke, Easthampton, Westfield, Ludlow, and Pittsfield Police Departments, the Springfield Office of the federal Homeland Security

Investigations Department, the Hampden County Sheriff's Department, and the Massachusetts National Guard.



"Massachusetts State Police photo."

Other agencies and units assisting in the investigation were the Springfield Police Firearm Investigation Unit, the Hampden District Attorney's Office, the State Police Detective Unit for Hampden County, the Springfield Office of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the US Postal Inspection Service, and the Hampden County Strategic Action and Focused Enforcement (SAFE) Unit.

As a result of the lengthy investigation, CINRET-West and partner agencies executed search warrants for several locations and vehicles throughout Hampden County and arrested the following persons:

1. JOSUE FIGUEROA, 29, of Springfield, charged with trafficking heroin or fentanyl, 200 grams or more; trafficking cocaine, 200 grams or more; and conspiracy to violate narcotic laws;
2. ROBERT BIGIO Sr., 60, of Springfield, charged with trafficking heroin, 100-200 grams; trafficking fentanyl, 10 or

more grams; trafficking cocaine, 100-200 grams; and possession of marijuana with intent to distribute;

3. ROBERT BIGIO Jr., 34, of Springfield, charged with trafficking heroin, 100-200 grams; trafficking fentanyl, 10 or more grams; trafficking cocaine, 100-200 grams; and possession of marijuana with intent to distribute;



“Massachusetts State Police photo.

4. ALEXANDER RODRIGUEZ, 33, of Holyoke, charged with trafficking heroin, 200 grams or more; trafficking fentanyl; and possession of marijuana with intent to distribute;

5. EMMANUEL MONTANO, 38, of Springfield, charged with trafficking in heroin or fentanyl, 36-100 grams;

6. HERIBERTO ESCALERA, 34, of Springfield, charged with trafficking heroin or fentanyl, 36-100 grams, 2nd offense; trafficking cocaine, 100-200 grams; unlawful possession of a firearm, two counts; unlawful possession of ammunition, two counts; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, two counts; possession of a firearm with a prior conviction for a crime involving violence or drugs, two

counts;

7. CHRISTOPHER BERMUDEZ, 29, of Holyoke, charged with possession of heroin; and

8. ANEUDY LOPEZ-SANTOS, 40, of Holyoke, charged with trafficking cocaine, 100-200 grams.

The arrests were made on various dates between Jan. 27 and Feb. 17, 2023.



“Massachusetts State Police photo.

“CINRET’s unique mission is to interdict large-scale drug trafficking organizations through long-term, complex investigations,” State Police Interim Colonel John Mawn Jr. said. “Dismantling these organizations that import death onto our streets is a priority of the Massachusetts State Police and our partner agencies.”

Springfield Police Superintendent Cheryl Clapprod stated,

“The CINRET-West Unit has a track record of removing significant amounts of narcotics from our city streets, arresting notable players involved in the drug trade and ultimately saving lives. The end result of this investigation is a testament to their dedicated service. Having a Springfield Police Task Force Officer assigned to this Unit ensures that we will continue to work together throughout Hampden County to seize these narcotics which are now far too often laced with the deadly synthetic opioid fentanyl. I’d like to thank Colonel Mawn and District Attorney Gulluni as well as our local and state partners on the CINRET-West team and our regional and federal involved in this successful investigation.”

The Springfield Metropolitan Area is a source of supply for large-scale narcotics trafficking in Western New England. Drug traffickers in the metropolitan area have direct connections to Connecticut and New York City.

Police in Massachusetts continue to respond to numerous fatalities caused by opiate overdoses. In 2022, State Police detectives responded to 57 overdoses believed caused by heroin or fentanyl in Hampden County, while Springfield Police detectives responded to 487 suspected overdoses in their city, with officers administering the overdose reversal drug Narcan 115 times.

Statewide in 2022, State Police detectives responded to 692 suspected heroin or fentanyl overdoses. As of Feb. 26, 2023, State Police have responded to 79 overdoses across the state. In 2022, State Troopers administered Narcan 56 times statewide, and have done so eight times thus far in 2023.

In recent years, under the direction of MSP Colonel (ret.) Christopher Mason and Interim Colonel John Mawn Jr., the CINRET-West Unit has targeted multiple drug trafficking organizations responsible for distribution of fentanyl. Within the past year, unit members have made multiple seizures of

fentanyl packaged as heroin and fentanyl pills marketed as Oxycodone pills. The Massachusetts State Police's two other regional CINRET task forces, CINRET-North and CINRET-South, have made multiple similar seizures of fentanyl and fentanyl pills in northeastern and southeastern Massachusetts during the same time period.

In addition to Hampden County prosecutors and police departments, CINRET-West also works closely with district attorneys and police agencies in Hampshire/Franklin, Worcester, and Berkshire Counties."-"Massachusetts State Police.