

Member of New Bedford Latin Kings Chapter Pleads Guilty to Racketeering Conspiracy and Drug Trafficking Charges

A former member of the New Bedford Chapter of the Massachusetts Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (“Latin Kings”) pleaded guilty yesterday to racketeering and drug charges.

Roberto Vargas, a/k/a “King Royalty,” 27, pleaded guilty before U.S. Senior District Court Judge Rya W. Zobel to conspiracy to conduct enterprise affairs through a pattern of racketeering activity, more commonly referred to as RICO conspiracy, and conspiracy to distribute, manufacture and possess with intent to distribute cocaine base. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled at a later date.

Vargas admitted that on Sept. 30, 2019, he was one of multiple members of the Latin Kings who travelled to Ruth Street and McGurk Street in New Bedford in order to confront rival gang members. After “flagging” – brandishing a yellow and black Latin Kings bandanna – in the territory of the rival gang, the Latin Kings members approached one of the rival gang members, surrounded him, pointed a firearm at him and demanded his phone. During the robbery, the victim ran from the Latin Kings, and another Latin Kings member chased the victim and fired one gunshot, hitting the victim in the back. The victim fell to the ground and was transported to the hospital, where he was treated and ultimately survived the incident.

Vargas also admitted to participating in the drug trafficking conspiracy that the Latin Kings operated in multi-unit apartment buildings controlled by the gang, known as trap

houses, throughout New Bedford.

The Latin Kings are a violent criminal enterprise comprised of thousands of members across the United States. The Latin Kings adhere to a national manifesto, employ an internal judiciary and use a sophisticated system of communication to maintain the hierarchy of the organization. As alleged in court documents, the gang uses drug distribution to generate revenue, and engages in violence against witnesses and rival gangs to further its influence and to protect its turf.

In December 2019, a federal grand jury returned an indictment alleging racketeering conspiracy, drug conspiracy and firearms charges against 62 leaders, members and associates of the Latin Kings. Robert Vargas is the 35th defendant to plead guilty in the case.

The RICO conspiracy charge provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of conspiracy to distribute controlled substances provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, at least three years and up to life of supervised and a fine of up to \$1 million. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

United States Attorney Andrew E. Lelling; Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Field Division; Commissioner Carol Mici of the Massachusetts Department of Correction; and New Bedford Police Chief Joseph C. Cordeiro made the announcement today. Valuable assistance was also provided by the FBI North Shore Gang Task Force and the Bristol County and Suffolk County District Attorney's Offices. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Philip A. Mallard and Lauren Graber of Lelling's Criminal Division are prosecuting the case.

The operation was conducted by a multi-agency task force

through the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), a partnership between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. The principal mission of the OCDETF program is to identify, disrupt and dismantle the most serious drug trafficking, weapons trafficking and money laundering organizations, and those primarily responsible for the nation's illegal drug supply. More information on the OCDETF program is available here: <https://www.justice.gov/ocdetf/about-ocdetf>.

The details contained in the charging documents are allegations. The remaining defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.