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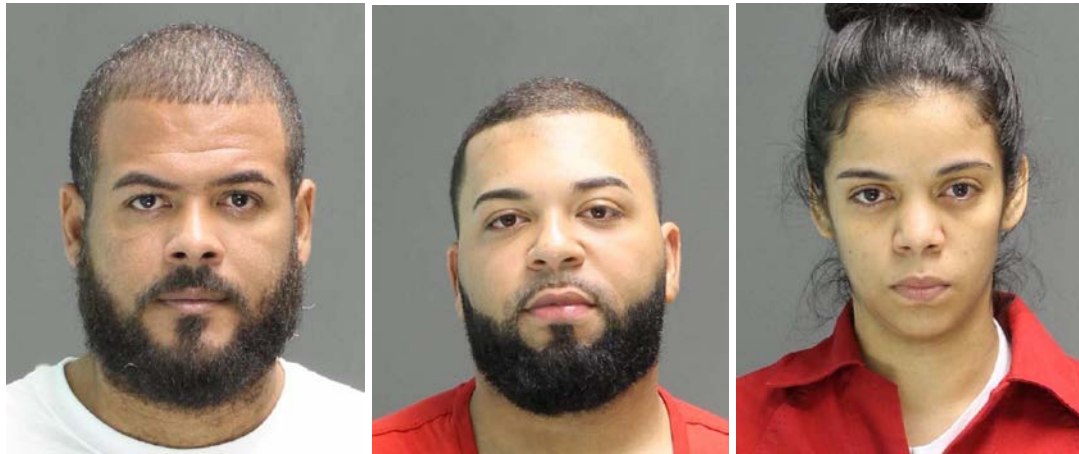
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ONE KILO OF FENTANYL SEIZED IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY DRUG INVESTIGATION; THREE TRAFFICKERS ARRESTED



Wilbert Taveras Payano Lincoln Payano Del Orbe Jr. Christina Mota Soto

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (Oct. 3, 2017)—Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele, Philadelphia District Attorney Kelley B. Hodge, DEA Special Agent In Charge Gary Tuggle and other federal, state and local law enforcement officials announced today the seizure of approximately one kilogram of fentanyl—enough fentanyl to prove fatal to almost half of Montgomery County's population—as well as the arrests of three individuals who trafficked the drugs.

Arrested were: Wilbert Taveras Payano 33, of Bronx, N.Y.; Lincoln Payano Del Orbe Jr., 25, of Philadelphia; and Christina Mota Soto, 29, of Philadelphia. The arrests were the result of a multi-agency investigation involving:

- Montgomery County Detective Bureau Narcotics Enforcement Team (NET)
- Montgomery County District Attorney's Office Local Drug Task Force
- Drug Enforcement Administration (Philadelphia Division)

- Philadelphia Police Department's IDIS Narcotics Unit
- Cheltenham Township Police Department
- Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Intelligence Center (PACIC)
- United States Marshal Service

“Fentanyl is deadly in very, very small quantities. Minute amounts of the drug can prove fatal. Given that 2 to 3 milligrams—five or six grains of fentanyl—can be fatal, this one kilo contained anywhere between 333,000 and 500,000 fatal doses. This seizure has without a doubt saved many lives, and the arrest of these three significant traffickers has made our county and the entire region safer. The level of cooperation and teamwork among law enforcement agencies is what led to this successful seizure and arrests,” said Steele, “and we will continue to be united in our fight against these deadly poisons that are killing our residents in Montgomery County and in the region.”

Steele noted that of the 249 overdose deaths in Montgomery County in 2016, 108 involved fentanyl, and while the overdose death rate is at this point in 2017 remaining steady, the involvement of fentanyl in overdose deaths has now surpassed 50 percent and is a major part of the crisis we are facing. “Fentanyl is being sold wittingly, as in this case, and unwittingly, and it is the most frequent mechanism of death we are facing,” said Steele.

The arrests were the culmination of a joint investigation that began with a controlled drug buy on July 11, 2017 of what was supposed to be heroin. The buy was a 14.8-gram “sample” purchased from defendant Mota Soto for \$1,000, in anticipation of the buyer returning to buy one kilo of heroin. Following that sale, the co-defendant Taveras Payano texted to Mota Soto, “what he bought yesterday is synthetic.” Testing of the purchased drug revealed that it was actually fentanyl, with no heroin present. Narcotics detectives and D.E.A. agents, through their contact, then negotiated to purchase a kilo of fentanyl from Mota Soto for the price of \$64,000. On July 24, 2017, that purchase took place in a shopping center in Cheltenham, and Mota Soto was taken into custody. The investigation continued, however, and detectives and agents were able to link Payano Del Orbe and Taveras Payano to the fentanyl sales. Specifically, authorities determined that Taveras Payano was the source of the fentanyl in Bronx, N.Y., and his cousin, Payano Del Orbe played an integral role in the two deliveries.

Mota Soto was arrested following the kilo sale. She was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Francis J. Lawrence Jr., who set bail at \$1 million cash. A preliminary hearing was held Sept. 7, 2017 before Magisterial District Judge Christopher J. Cerski, who held all charges.

Payano Del Orbe Jr. was arrested on Aug. 21, 2017, and arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Henry Schireson, who set bail at \$1 million cash. A preliminary hearing was held Sept. 28, 2017 before Judge Cerski, who held all charges.

Taveras Payano was arrested on Sept. 20, 2017, in Bronx, N.Y. He waived extradition and was taken into Montgomery County custody on Sept. 25, 2017. Taveras Payano was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge John D. Kessler, who set bail at \$1 million cash. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Oct. 10, 2017 before Judge Cerski.

All three defendants are charged with Possession with the Intent to Deliver, Conspiracy to PWID, Dealing in the Proceeds of Unlawful Activities and other related charges. The defendants failed to post bail and are in the Montgomery County Correctional Facility.

The case will be prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Robert J. Kolansky.

Approved for release:

Kevin R. Steele

CRIMINAL CHARGES, AND ANY DISCUSSION THEREOF, ARE MERELY ALLEGATIONS AND ALL DEFENDANTS ARE PRESUMED INNOCENT UNTIL AND UNLESS PROVEN GUILTY.