

# NEWS

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United States Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey  
970 Broad Street, Seventh Floor  
Newark, New Jersey 07102

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***Ralph J. Marra, Jr., Acting U.S. Attorney***

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***More Information?*** Call the Assistant U.S. Attorney or other contact listed below to see if more information is available.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Hudson County Murder Suspect Admits Conspiring to Distribute Narcotics

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(More)

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CAMDEN – A Linden man who is also facing murder charges in Hudson County pleaded guilty in federal court today to conspiring to distributing ecstasy pills, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

Zia Berisha, 34, pleaded guilty to a one-count Information charging him with conspiracy to distribute 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, commonly known as ecstasy, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan W. Romankow. Following the guilty plea, U.S. District Judge Robert B. Kugler ordered Berisha returned to custody, where he has been since his arrest on Nov. 7, 2007.

Berisha faces a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$1 million fine. Sentencing before Judge Kugler is scheduled for April 9.

FBI agents had been investigating Berisha's drug-dealing activity for several months when he was arrested in Elizabeth. Berisha was pulled over by Elizabeth police officers for a traffic violation, and officers found drugs, cash and several expensive watches in Berisha's car. Berisha also had outstanding arrest warrants for probation violations at that time.

Later that same day, Michael Marro, 39, was found beaten and shot to death in his Jersey City apartment. The Hudson County Prosecutor's Office soon charged Berisha with Marro's murder after it was determined that one of the watches found in Berisha's car belonged to Marro, and that Berisha and Marro had exchanged text messages the night of the murder. Another individual, Agim Gjonbalahj, 34, of Brooklyn, N.Y., was arrested on Oct. 29, 2008, and has also been charged in Marro's murder. The murder trial in state Superior Court is set for early 2009.

At today's plea hearing, Berisha admitted that on May 8, 2006, he bought 4,000 ecstasy pills from individuals in Brooklyn for \$14,000. He also admitted that on June 20, 2006, he sold approximately 1,300 ecstasy pills to an individual in Linden for approximately \$5,000. That individual was actually a cooperating witness working with the FBI.

Two other associates of Berisha have pleaded guilty to drug distribution charges. Daniel Ventura, 34, of Edison, and Anthony Parrinello, 33, of Woodbridge, recently pleaded guilty before Judge Kugler to conspiring with Berisha to distribute narcotic painkillers containing oxycodone, specifically, Percocet and Roxicet. Both will be sentenced in March 2009, and face a maximum of 20 years in prison and a \$1,000,000 fine.

In determining an actual sentence for Berisha, Judge Kugler will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms

must serve nearly all that time.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, for the investigation of Berisha and the co-defendants.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan W. Romankow.

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Defense Counsel:

for Berisha: Josh Reinitz, Esq., Nutley

for Ventura: Christopher Patella, Esq., Bayonne

for Parrinello: John C. Whipple, Esq., Chatham