

NEWS

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Notorious Newark Drug Trafficker Hakeem Curry Gets Life in Prison

(More)

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NEWARK – Notorious and violent Newark heroin and cocaine trafficker Hakeem Curry

was sentenced today to life in prison for his convictions last July on drug conspiracy and money laundering charges in connection with his leadership of a ring that sold thousands of pounds of drugs in Essex and Union county neighborhoods, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Curry, 31, will spend the rest of his life in prison without the possibility of parole following his sentence today by U.S. District Judge Faith S. Hochberg.

Curry faced a mandatory minimum prison sentence of 20 years and up to life in prison. One of the sentencing factors emphasized by the government today at the sentencing and taken into account by Judge Hochberg was evidence that Curry and his co-defendant, Rakim Baskerville, tried to hire a hit man to murder one of the government's witnesses during the trial last summer. Judge Hochberg sentenced Baskerville to life in prison last week.

"Curry is among the most brutal, dangerous criminals we've prosecuted," said Christie. "If anyone ever has earned a life term in federal prison, it's Hakeem Curry."

Christie noted that the U.S. Attorney's Office has successfully convicted numerous top-echelon drug dealers from Essex and Camden counties and elsewhere in New Jersey, resulting in sentences ranging from decades to life in prison for them and their associates. There is no parole in the federal system.

"These are the individuals who hold back progress in our urban areas, who poison our children with drugs and ruin neighborhoods with violence," said Christie. "It is our goal to remove them permanently from our streets and from society."

Curry and Baskerville, the latter a street-level manager for the Curry Organization, were both convicted by the same jury on July 24, 2006. Both were found guilty of drug trafficking conspiracy; Curry was also convicted of money laundering and other counts.

The jury found that the government proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the conspiracy involved at least five kilograms or more of cocaine and, separately, at least one kilogram of heroin. That and other factors – including findings by Judge Hochberg that Curry obstructed justice by seeking to have a trial witness murdered and that both were leaders in a drug organization – made them eligible for the life sentences they received.

For years, the Curry organization was estimated to supply approximately 85 percent of the heroin in Newark and was known to have the highest quality heroin in the city. The organization also supplied 30 to 50 kilograms of cocaine a week through its network of street-level managers and distributors. At its height, the organization brought in millions of dollars a year in drug profits according to cooperating witnesses and other evidence.

Testimony from cooperating witnesses and other evidence revealed that Curry arranged at least two murders, one of a street-level drug dealer, Darnell “Buck” Anderson in 2001, the other a March 2004 execution-style slaying of Derrick Berrian, who had been scheduled to testify in state Superior Court against a drug associate of Curry’s.

The case was tried by Assistant U.S. Attorneys John Gay and Robert Frazer. The two-year investigation of Curry and his drug organization was conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration, with assistance from the Newark Police Department.

Curry, according to testimony, lived the high-style life of a drug kingpin. He drove a \$120,000 Mercedes Benz and an \$80,000 Land Rover, lived in a luxury apartment, bought hundreds of thousands of dollars of custom-made jewelry and took lavish trips to various sporting events around the country.

Christie praised the trial team of Gay and Frazer, as well as DEA Special Agents and Task Force Officers, for their work in the Curry Organization investigation.

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Defense Counsel: James Plaisted, Esq., Roseland