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**FORMER HEAD OF CHICAGO DISTRIBUTION CELL OF LA FAMILIA  
MEXICAN DRUG CARTEL SENTENCED TO 40 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON**

CHICAGO — The former head of the Chicago distribution network of a Mexican drug-trafficking cartel was sentenced today to serve 40 years in federal prison for his participation in a narcotics conspiracy after pleading guilty earlier this year to orchestrating the distribution of more than 420 kilograms of cocaine and the collection of more than \$5.7 million in drug proceeds. The defendant, **Jose Gonzalez-Zavala**, also known as “Panda,” directed the operations of the local distribution cell of a drug-trafficking cartel known as La Familia Michoacana from December 2008 until he was arrested in June 2009. As the head of the distribution cell, Zavala, 38, maintained frequent, usually daily, contact with an individual identified as the general manager of La Familia Michoacana’s drug-trafficking operations in the United States, and directed the activities of approximately four other individuals who distributed multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine to wholesale distributors in Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana. At the time of his arrest, Drug Enforcement Administration agents seized approximately 54 kilograms of cocaine and approximately \$1.3 million in cash from “stash” houses operated at Gonzalez-Zavala’s direction.

In imposing the 480-month sentence, U.S. District Judge William J. Hibbler noted the integral role Gonzalez-Zavala played in the wide-scale distribution of cocaine in the Chicago area, and the

devastating impact Gonzalez-Zavala's activities had on the welfare of the community. Gonzalez-Zavala faced an advisory federal sentencing guideline range of life in prison. Gonzalez-Zavala agreed to the entry of an order forfeiting his interest in \$20 million, representing the proceeds of the Chicago-based distribution cell of La Familia Michoacana.

Gonzalez-Zavala and more than 20 other defendants were charged in multiple indictments beginning in November 2009 with narcotics conspiracy and related drug-trafficking charges concerning the illegal operations of La Familia Michoacana in the Chicago area. Gonzalez-Zavala pleaded guilty in March 2011 to one count of narcotics conspiracy. To date, 15 defendants have pleaded guilty; charges remain pending against six defendants, and three defendants are fugitives.

The sentence was announced by Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Jack Riley, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration. The Illinois State Police, the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, and the Chicago, Aurora and Arlington Heights police departments assisted in the investigation under the auspices of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force.

During the investigation, DEA agents seized approximately 250 kilograms of cocaine and \$8 million. The seizures occurred mostly in suburban locales, including Berwyn, Bolingbrook, Oak Lawn, Hickory Hills, Joliet and Justice, officials said. The investigation, which began in 2007, is part of *Project Coronado*, a multi-agency narcotics-trafficking investigation that focused on La Familia's distribution network throughout the United States.

The government was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Amarjeet S. Bhachu, Michael T. Donovan, Stephen P. Baker, Erika L. Csicsila and Megan Church.

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