



# UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

## *Southern District of New York*

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### **MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY CHARGES 34 MEMBERS OF BRONX DRUG TRAFFICKING CREWS WITH DISTRIBUTING CRACK COCAINE**

*Undercover Officers Made Approximately 150 Narcotics Purchases in 18-Month Period*

Preet Bharara, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Wilbert L. Plummer, the Acting Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Field Division of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), and Raymond W. Kelly, the Police Commissioner of the City of New York ("NYPD"), today announced charges against 34 individuals for conspiring to sell crack cocaine in and around two apartment buildings in the Bronx – the Allerton Avenue Co-ops (the "Coops") and the Parkside Houses. In a coordinated takedown earlier today, 19 of the defendants were arrested. Eight of the defendants are already in custody on state charges, and seven defendants are still being sought.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said: "Drug dealers infect neighborhoods with their presence and poison a community's lifeblood – literally and figuratively. With today's arrests, we are taking a positive step forward in improving the quality of life in at least two New York City buildings and the surrounding community. Together with our law enforcement partners, our commitment to cleaning up the streets of New York for its citizens is a top priority."

Acting DEA Special Agent-in-Charge Wilbert L. Plummer said: "Over the past year and a half, DEA and our law enforcement partners have been investigating this cocaine distribution organization based in the Bronx. Crack cocaine abuse is deadly as well as the violence associated with drug trafficking. Those who live in the Allerton Avenue Co-ops and Parkside Houses should be able to live their lives without the fear of drug trafficking and gun violence."

NYPD Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said: "As we saw this week with the murder of Police Officer Peter Figoski, illegal drugs fuel violence that all too often ends in tragedy. The individuals arrested this morning were responsible for distributing illegal drugs and plaguing a

Bronx neighborhood with violence. I commend the NYPD's Narcotics Bureau, our federal partners and the U.S Attorney's Office for taking action and removing these dangerous individuals from our streets."

As alleged in the Complaint, which was unsealed today in Manhattan Federal Court:

The defendants are involved in a large-scale conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine in and around the Coops and Parkside Houses. Since 2006, NYPD officers have made over 150 undercover purchases totaling approximately 500 grams of crack cocaine from the defendants and their co-conspirators.

According to the Complaint, YACKEEM McFARLANE controlled crack cocaine sales in and around the Coops and Parkside Houses, and crack dealers needed his permission before selling in the area. McFARLANE and ELVIN SKELTON supplied crack to several dealers in the vicinity of the Coops and Parkside Houses; McFARLANE set the price and SKELTON created the crack cocaine by cooking powder cocaine. BERNARD MILES, one of their suppliers, delivered powder cocaine to them once or twice a week. ARMANI CUMMINGS acted as an enforcer for McFARLANE and SKELTON. MARQUIS BRANCH also supplied crack cocaine to McFARLANE, as well as defendants BRYAN RHODES, ALLEN COLON, JAMEL WRIGHT, and CHARLES MATTHEWS. BRANCH typically carried large amounts of cash and was protected by other crack dealers in the neighborhood.

In addition, McFARLANE is charged with possessing a firearm in furtherance of his drug trafficking activities at the Coops and Parkside Houses.

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The 19 defendants arrested this morning will be presented in Manhattan federal court later this afternoon. MATTHEWS, CUMMINGS, COLON, CARLOS PONCE, RICHARD POLITE, FAHEEM TAYLOR, JUSTIN FREYTES, and LECHE CORNISH are already in custody on state charges. MCFARLANE, BENNY MONDAY, CHRISTOPHER NWANKO BRYAN RHODES, VERLERIA THOMAS, JOANNE DORTCH and VELMA HARRIS remain at large. The charges against each defendant and the corresponding maximum potential penalties are outlined in a chart attached to this press release.

During the investigation, which spanned several years, federal and local law enforcement agencies, working with the Manhattan U.S. Attorney's Office, used undercover officers and information from cooperating witnesses to infiltrate the drug trafficking organization. Mr. Bharara praised the outstanding investigative work of the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, which is comprised of agents and officers of the DEA, NYPD and the New York State Police, and the NYPD Narcotics Borough Bronx. He also thanked the U.S. Marshals Service. He added that the investigation is continuing.

The prosecution of these cases is being overseen by the Office's Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Michael Ferrara, Hadassa Waxman, and Russell Capone are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Complaint are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

11-379

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U.S. v. Marquis Branch, et al.

	<b>CHARGE</b>	<b>DEFENDANTS</b>	<b>MAXIMUM PENALTIES</b>
1	Narcotics conspiracy (Conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute 280 grams and more of crack cocaine)	MARQUIS BRANCH BERNARD MILES YACKEEM MCFARLANE ELVIN SKELTON ARMANI CUMMINGS BENNY MONDAY CHRISTOPHER NWANKO BRYAN RHODES DASEAN RHODES JOELL TOMLINSON JAMES EVANS RICHARD POLITE FAHEEM TAYLOR JUSTIN FREYTES ALLEN COLON JAMEL WRIGHT CHRISTOPHER POLANCO CHARLES MATTHEWS CARLOS PONCE RICHARD BARNWELL SHAWN WEDDERBURN JIM VOLCY CAROLIN PEREZ IRIS CLASE VELMA HARRIS KAREN BAXTON VERLERIA THOMAS TWILER HOWARD JUANITA TUCKER JOANNE DORTCH DONNELL HARRIS RAFAEL RIVERA CLYDE JONES LECHE CORNISH	Life in prison  Mandatory minimum: 10 years in prison

2	Possession of a firearm during and in relation to a drug trafficking crime	YACKEEM McFARLANE	Life in prison Mandatory minimum: five years in prison
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DEFENDANT	AGE	RESIDENCE
MARQUIS BRANCH	35	Bronx, New York
BERNARD MILES	24	Bronx, New York
YACKEEM McFARLANE	22	Bronx, New York
ELVIN SKELTON	24	Bronx, New York
ARMANI CUMMINGS	20	Incarcerated
BENNY MONDAY	37	Bronx, New York
CHRISTOPHER NWANKO	21	Bronx, New York
BRYAN RHODES	22	Bronx, New York
DASEAN RHODES	20	Bronx, New York
JOELL TOMLINSON	21	Bronx, New York
JAMES EVANS	20	Bronx, New York
RICHARD POLITE	22	Incarcerated
FAHEEM TAYLOR	22	Incarcerated
JUSTIN FREYTES	21	Incarcerated
ALLEN COLON	20	Incarcerated
JAMEL WRIGHT	26	Bronx, New York
CHRISTOPHER POLANCO	26	Bronx, New York
CHARLES MATTHEWS	20	Incarcerated
CARLOS PONCE	20	Incarcerated
RICHARD BARNWELL	20	Bronx, New York
SHAWN WEDDERBURN	18	Bronx, New York
JIM VOLCY	40	Bronx, New York
CAROLIN PEREZ	27	Bronx, New York
IRIS CLASE	25	Bronx, New York
VELMA HARRIS	45	Bronx, New York

KAREN BAXTON	42	Bronx, New York
VERLERIA THOMAS	29	Bronx, New York
TWILER HOWARD	50	Bronx, New York
JUANITA TUCKER	42	Bronx, New York
JOANNE DORTCH	53	Bronx, New York
DONNELL HARRIS	24	Bronx, New York
RAFAEL RIVERA	59	Bronx, New York
CLYDE JONES	38	Bronx, New York
LECHE CORNISH	26	Incarcerated