

Department of Justice

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Western District of New York

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FIVE DEFENDANTS PLEAD GUILTY TO DRUG CHARGES

BUFFALO, N.Y.-- U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Rodney Hill, 47, Sharon Jackson, 46, Bryant Woods, 46, Jermaine Howard, 37, and Wardell Epps, 42, all of Buffalo, N.Y., pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara to various narcotics trafficking offenses.

Specifically, Rodney Hill pleaded guilty to engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise which carries a mandatory minimum penalty of 20 years in prison, a maximum of life, a fine of \$2,000,000, or both. Sharon Jackson pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute, and to distribute, five kilograms or more of cocaine, which carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison, a maximum of life, a fine of \$4,000,000, or both. Bryant Woods pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute, and to distribute, crack cocaine, which is punishable by a maximum 20 years in prison, a fine of \$1,000,000, or both. Wardell Epps pleaded guilty to one count, and Howard pleaded guilty to three counts of using a communication facility to facilitate a federal narcotics felony, all of which carry a maximum punishment of four years in prison, a fine of \$250,000, or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert C. Moscati, who is handling the case, stated that Hill

and two other individuals directed several persons to transport hundreds of thousands of dollars at a time to Houston, Texas for the purpose of purchasing multiple kilograms of cocaine, sometimes ranging from 10 to more than 30 kilograms at a time. The cocaine was transported by car, or shipped in packages, from Houston back to Buffalo, with numerous persons assisting in these activities.

On one of these trips, Jackson was stopped in Louisiana in January 2008 with 32 kilograms of cocaine and three firearms which were found in a hidden compartment in the vehicle she was driving. Woods was intercepted in a court-authorized wiretap discussing

and arranging payment for prior purchases of crack cocaine by Woods from Hill. Howard and Epps were intercepted during the wiretap discussing and arranging illegal narcotics transactions with David Manuel, who also pleaded guilty last week.

The five defendants were arrested along with 15 others for their involvement in this multi-kilogram cocaine distribution network. To date, twelve defendants have pleaded guilty.

"This is another successful effort against organized criminal activity in Western New York," said U.S. Attorney Hochul. "The public has a vital role to play as we continue to target those who would fill the streets of our community with drugs and violence."

Today's convictions are the culmination of an investigation on the part of Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Safe Streets Task Force under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Christopher M. Piehota, the Drug Enforcement Agency under the direction of Wilbert L. Plummer, Acting Special Agent in Charge, New York Field Division, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco under the direction of Resident Agent in Charge Frank Christiano.

Sentencing for Rodney Hill is September 14, 2012 at 1:00 pm. Sentencing for Sharon Jackson is September 14, 2012 at 12:30 pm. Sentencing for Bryant Woods is September 13, 2012 at 1:00 pm. Sentencing for Jermaine Howard is September 19, 2012 at 1:00 pm. Sentencing for Wardell Epps is September 13, 2012 at 12:30 pm. All sentencings will be before U.S. District Judge Arcara.