



The United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
Western District of Louisiana

For Immediate Release
February 7, 2013

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FORMER SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER PLEADS GUILTY TO COCAINE TRAFFICKING

SHREVEPORT, La: United States Attorney Stephanie A. Finley announced today that former DeSoto Parish School Board member Bartholomew Claiborne, 25, of Mansfield, pleaded guilty Thursday before U.S. District Judge Elizabeth E. Foote to distributing cocaine.

Claiborne was indicted on Sept. 4, 2012, for distributing cocaine. According to the indictment, Claiborne was recorded to have distributed cocaine on 14 separate occasions between Oct. 11, 2011 and July 12, 2012. Authorities used surveillance methods to observe Claiborne selling cocaine.

Claiborne faces up to 20 years in prison, a fine of \$1 million or both with three years of supervised release on the count. Sentencing has been set for May 21, 2013 at 11:30 a.m.

"As an elected official, Bartholomew Claiborne swore to uphold the law, and by his own admission, failed to do so," Finley stated. "He also failed the children and parents of his school board district where he served as a role model. We hope this case sends a message that public officials are not above the law. We will continue to prosecute those who violate federal laws. I thank all of the agencies on a federal, state and local level who participated in the investigation."

Claiborne was the first indictment as part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) "Operation Limpiar Casa." The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the DeSoto Parish Sheriff's Office, the Mansfield Police Department, and the Tri-Parish Task Force which includes DeSoto, Sabine and Red River parishes, participate in the OCDETF program and conducted the operation.

The OCDETF program is a joint federal, state and local cooperative approach to combat drug trafficking and is the nation's primary tool for disrupting and dismantling major drug trafficking organizations, targeting national and regional level drug trafficking organizations, and coordinating the necessary law enforcement entities and resources to disrupt or dismantle the targeted criminal organization and seize their assets.

First Assistant U.S. Attorney Alexander Van Hook is prosecuting the case.

United States Attorney Stephanie Finley is available for comment and can be reached at (337) 262-6618.

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