



Department of Justice

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Two Men Illegally Residing in Lexington Convicted of Drug Trafficking, Firearms, and Immigration Offenses

LEXINGTON, Ky. – Two Mexican nationals, illegally residing in Lexington, were convicted by a federal jury yesterday, following a two-day trial in U.S. District Court. Fernando Rafael Lara Salas, who had previously used the alias of Jesus Ruiz Vega, age 40, and Jorge Macias Pedroza, age 30, were each convicted of conspiracy to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine, possession with intent to distribute multiple controlled substances, including fentanyl, methamphetamine, and tramadol, as well as being an alien in possession of a firearm. In addition, Lara Salas was also convicted of possession with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine, possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug-trafficking crime, possession of a firearm as a convicted felon, and unlawfully entering the United States after previously being deported for a felony drug possession offense.

The joint investigation by federal and state law enforcement into the drug trafficking activities of both defendants began in August 2016 and culminated with the execution of search warrants, at the homes of both defendants and a cargo trailer used by both men. The searches resulted in the seizure of 6 kilograms of cocaine, 4 kilograms of tramadol, residual amounts of fentanyl, more than 50 grams of methamphetamine, and two 9 mm firearms. Lara Salas also had approximately \$110,000 in U.S. currency seized from his residence. Lara Salas was illegally present in the United States at the time of his arrest, due to his prior deportation resulting from a previous conviction on a federal drug possession charge. Macias Pedroza was also illegally present in the United States at the time of his arrest. The investigation was a cooperative effort led by investigators with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); and the Lexington Police Department.

“The defendants in this case were dealing in massive quantities of dangerous drugs,” said Robert M. Duncan, Jr., United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky. “The number of overdose deaths in our community continues to rise, and the quantities of illegal drugs involved in this criminal conspiracy were placing many lives in danger. Without the outstanding work of our law enforcements partners, this prosecution would not have been possible. Their efforts removed these drugs from our streets, made our community safer, and saved lives. Prosecuting those who deal in this scourge to our community will continue to be a core priority of our Office.”

United States Attorney Duncan; Darrell Christopher Evans, Special Agent in Charge, DEA Louisville; Shawn Byers, Assistant Field Office Director, ICE; and Ron Compton, Acting Chief of Police, Lexington-Fayette County Division of Police, jointly announced the jury’s verdict.

The sentencing hearings for both defendants are currently scheduled for May 4, 2018, at the federal courthouse in Lexington. Lara Salas faces 25 years to life in prison and Pedroza faces 10 years to life. The U.S. District Court will consider the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and the federal statutes before imposing sentence.

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