

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
TAMPA DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

8:26-cr-97-JLB-CPT

v.

Case No.

ERNEST GRIMALDI,
ASHLEY FRACCALVIERI,
APRIL VANZANT, and
NICOLE KNECHT

21 U.S.C. § 846
(Drug Trafficking
Conspiracy)

18 U.S.C. § 371
(Conspiracy to Bribe
Public Officials and to
Introduce Contraband
Into Prison)

SEALED

INDICTMENT

MAR 18 2026 PM 1:24
FILED - USDC - FLMD - TPA

The Grand Jury charges:

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

At all times material to this Incitement:

1. Citrus County Detention Facility ("CCDF") was a private jail in the Middle District of Florida. CCDF was a facility in which persons are held in custody by direction of or pursuant to a contract or agreement with the United States Attorney General. Inmates held at CCDF include those awaiting trial and sentencing at the United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, inmates awaiting designation with the United States Bureau of Prisons to serve federal prison sentences, and state inmates in similar postures.
2. CCDF was intended to be a secure facility. Secure facilities rely on employees with regular access to inmates to help maintain the security of facilities

like CCDF. As a secure facility, and pursuant to its agreement with the Attorney General and Florida and federal law, items such as cellular phones are prohibited at CCDF and considered contraband.

3. Written policies at CCDF confirmed this prohibition. For example, CCDF onboarding paperwork signed by employees confirmed that employees were prohibited from the introduction of contraband to federal or CoreCivic property without the United States Government's permission.

4. ERNEST GRIMALDI was a resident of the Middle District of Florida and an inmate at Citrus County Detention Facility ("CCDF"). GRIMALDI was held at CCDF on state oxycodone trafficking charges.

5. ASHLEY FRACCALVIERI was a guard employed at CCDF.

6. APRIL VANZANT was a resident of the Middle District of Florida. Her son, Coconspirator 1, was an inmate at CCDF.

7. NICOLE KNECHT was a nurse employed at CCDF.

8. KNECHT and FRACCALVIERI were public officials as defined in 18 U.S.C. § 201.

9. Beginning on an unknown date, but not later than on or about October 31, 2025, and continuing through on or about November 18, 2025, GRIMALDI worked with FRACCALVIERI, VANZANT, KNECHT, and others to introduce controlled substances and other contraband into CCDF. And to facilitate this trafficking, GRIMALDI and others paid public officials at CCDF to help smuggle in contraband.

10. KNECHT used her role as a nurse at CCDF to smuggle contraband into CCDF. In exchange for the smuggling of contraband into CCDF, KNECHT solicited and received payments from inmates and associates of those inmates.

11. GRIMALDI directed associates, including FRACCALVIERI, to send payments to KNECHT and other CCDF employees in exchange for contraband smuggling services.

12. In total, KNECHT received at least \$8,800 in bribes to her CashApp account.

13. On or about November 13, 2025, law enforcement stopped KNECHT's car as she left a meeting with FRACCALVIERI. KNECHT had a Ziploc bag containing white powder and pieces of paper that later tested positive for MDMB-4en-PINACA, a controlled substance. KNECHT also had over \$1,750 and two packages of naloxone strips. KNECHT had these controlled substances to introduce them into CCDF.

14. Then, on or about November 15, 2025, law enforcement stopped FRACCALVIERI's car after FRACCALVIERI left a meeting with VANZANT. FRACCALVIERI had over 400 oxycodone pills, a Schedule II controlled substance. Those pills, like the controlled substances seized from KNECHT, were to be introduced into CCDF.

COUNT ONE
(Drug Trafficking Conspiracy)

Paragraphs 1 through 14 of this Indictment are incorporated as though set forth herein.

Beginning on an unknown date, but not later than on or about October 31, 2025, and continuing through on or about November 18, 2025, in the Middle District of Florida, and elsewhere, the defendants,

ERNEST GRIMALDI,
ASHLEY FRACCALVIERI,
APRIL VANZANT, and
NICOLE KNECT,

did knowingly and willfully conspire with each other and other persons, both known and unknown to the Grand Jury, to possess with intent to distribute controlled substances.

The violation involved a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of oxycodone, a Schedule II controlled substance, and a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of MDMB-4en-PINACA, a Schedule I controlled substance, in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(1)(C).

It was part of the conspiracy that the conspirators would perform acts and make statements to hide and conceal and cause to be hidden and concealed the purpose of the conspiracy and the acts committed in furtherance thereof.

All in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 846 and 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(1)(C).

COUNT TWO

(Conspiracy to Bribe Public Officials and Introduce Contraband into Prison)

Paragraphs 1 through 14 of this Indictment are incorporated as though set forth herein.

From an unknown date, but no later than in or around February 2025, and continuing through in or around December 2025, in the Middle District of Florida, and elsewhere, the defendants,

ERNEST GRIMALDI,
ASHLEY FRACCALVIERI,
APRIL VANZANT, and
NICOLE KNECT,

did knowingly and willfully conspire with each other and other persons, both known and unknown to the Grand Jury, to commit offenses against the United States, including violations of 18 U.S.C. § 201 and 18 U.S.C. § 1791.

MANNER AND MEANS OF THE CONSPIRACY

The manner and means by the defendants,

ERNEST GRIMALDI,
ASHLEY FRACCALVIERI,
APRIL VANZANT, and
NICOLE KNECT,

and others known and unknown to the Grand Jury, sought to accomplish the objectives of the conspiracy, which included, among other things, the following:

15. It was part of the conspiracy that GRIMALDI, FRACCALVIERI, KNECHT, and coconspirators would corruptly give, offer, and promise anything of

value to a public official with the intent to induce such public official to do or omit to do any act in violation of the public official's lawful duty.

16. It was part of the conspiracy that KNECHT, being a public official, would corruptly demand, seek, receive, accept, and agree to receive and accept something of value, to wit, money, in return for being induced to do and omit to do an act in violation of KNECHT's official duty.

17. It was part of the conspiracy that KNECHT, GRIMALDI, VANZANT, and FRACCALVIERI, in violation of a statute, rule, and order issued under a statute, including 28 C.F.R. § 6.1, would provide and attempt to provide to an inmate of a prison a prohibited object, as that term is defined in 18 U.S.C. § 1791(d)(1).

18. It was part of the conspiracy that conspirators would communicate, via jail calls and otherwise, about the smuggling of contraband into CCDF.

19. It was part of the conspiracy that conspirators would smuggle contraband, including controlled substances and phones, into CCDF.

20. It was part of the conspiracy that conspirators would send payments to members of CCDF's staff to facilitate the introduction of contraband.

21. It was part of the conspiracy that the conspirators would perform acts and make statements to hide and conceal and cause to be hidden and concealed the purpose of the conspiracy and the acts committed in furtherance thereof.

OVERT ACTS

In furtherance of the conspiracy, the defendants,

ERNEST GRIMALDI,
ASHLEY FRACCALVIERI,
APRIL VANZANT, and
NICOLE KNECT,

and others known and unknown to the Grand Jury, did commit and cause to be committed the following overt acts, among others, in the Middle District of Florida and elsewhere:

22. On or about May 19, 2025, KNECHT sent a CashApp payment of approximately \$1,000 to a CCDF guard with the caption "EBO."

23. On or about May 29, 2025, KNECHT sent a CashApp payment of approximately \$1,000 to a CCDF guard with the caption "EBO."

24. On or about September 27, 2025, FRACCALVIERI discussed payments owed to Coconspirator 2 for contraband on behalf of GRIMALDI.

25. On or about November 5, 2025, KNECHT and FRACCALVIERI met in the Middle District of Florida.

26. On or about November 5, 2025, KNECHT asked FRACCALVIERI to "send me money because I could get in trouble and not have gotten a dime for it."

27. On or about November 9, 2025, KNECHT asked FRACCALVIERI for "the 600 cash" because she "would much rather do it that way then sending it online."

28. On or about November 11, 2025, GRIMALDI directed FRACCALVIERI to send money to KNECHT.

29. On or about November 13, 2025, KNECHT and FRACCALVIERI met to exchange contraband to be introduced into CCDF.

30. On or about November 15, 2025, FRACCALVIERI and VANZANT met to exchange contraband to be introduced into CCDF.

All in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371.

COUNT THREE
(Acceptance of a Bribe by a Public Official)

Paragraphs 1 through 30 of this Indictment are incorporated as though set forth herein.

On or about November 5, 2025, in the Middle District of Florida, the defendant,

NICOLE KNECHT,

being a public official, employed as a nurse at CCDF, did directly and indirectly, knowingly and corruptly seek and agree to receive and accept anything of value personally in return for being influenced in the performance of any official act and being induced to do and omit to do any act in violation of the official duty of such public official, that is, to introduce contraband into a facility in which persons are held in custody by direction of or pursuant to a contract or agreement with the Attorney General for an inmate in return for the payment of monies.

In violation of 18 U.S.C. § 201(b)(2).

COUNT FOUR
(Bribery of a Public Official)

On or about November 3, 2025, in the Middle District of Florida, the defendants,

ERNEST GRIMALDI and
ASHLEY FRACCALVIERI,

did, directly and indirectly, corruptly give, offer, and promise a thing of value to a public official, with intent to induce a public official to do an act and omit to do an act in violation of their official duty, that is, to introduce contraband into a facility in which persons are held in custody by direction of or pursuant to a contract or agreement with the Attorney General for an inmate in return for the payment of monies.

In violation of 18 U.S.C. § 201(b)(1) and 18 U.S.C. § 2.

FORFEITURE

1. The allegations contained in Counts One, Two, Three, and Four are incorporated by reference for the purpose of alleging forfeiture pursuant to the provisions of 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(C), 21 U.S.C. § 853, and 28 U.S.C. § 2461(c).

2. Upon conviction of a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371, 18 U.S.C. § 201(b)(1), or 18 U.S.C. § 201(b)(2), the defendants shall forfeit to the United States, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(C) and 28 U.S.C. § 2461(c), any property, real or personal, which constitutes or is derived from proceeds traceable to the offense.

3. Upon conviction of a violation of 21 U.S.C. § 846, the defendants shall forfeit to the United States, pursuant to 21 U.S.C. §§ 853(a)(1) and (2), any property

constituting, or derived from, any proceeds the defendants obtained, directly or indirectly, as a result of such violation, and any property used, or intended to be used, in any manner or part, to commit, or to facilitate the commission of, such violation.

4. The property to be forfeited includes, but is not limited to, an order of forfeiture in the amount of at least \$8,800, which constitutes proceeds of the offense.

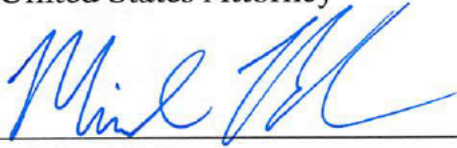
5. If any of the property described above, as a result of any act or omission of the defendants:


- a. cannot be located upon the exercise of due diligence;
- b. has been transferred or sold to, or deposited with, a third party;
- c. has been placed beyond the jurisdiction of the court;
- d. has been substantially diminished in value; or
- e. has been commingled with other property which cannot be divided without difficulty,

the United States shall be entitled to forfeiture of substitute property under the provisions of 21 U.S.C. § 853(p), directly and as incorporated by 28 U.S.C. § 2461(c).



GREGORY W. KEHOE
United States Attorney

By: 
Michael J. Buchanan
Assistant United States Attorney

By: 
Daniel Baeza
Assistant United States Attorney
Chief, National Security and
International Narcotics Section

March 26

No.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
Middle District of Florida
Tampa Division

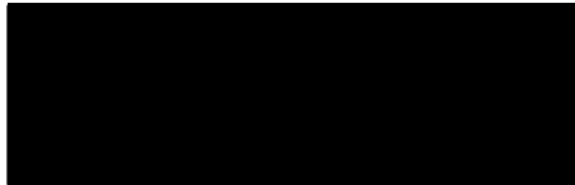
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

vs.

ERNEST GRIMALDI, ET AL

INDICTMENT

Violations: 21 U.S.C. § 846; 18 U.S.C. § 371



Filed in open court this 18th day

of March, 2026.

Lynne Vito

Clerk

Bail \$ _____