


AF Approval 

Chief Approval 

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
TAMPA DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

CASE NO. 8:19-cr-398-T-33SPF

MARIA BASSI LAURO

PLEA AGREEMENT

Pursuant to Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c), the United States of America, by Maria Chapa Lopez, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, and the defendant, Maria Bassi Lauro, and the attorney for the defendant, Patrick McKamey, Esq., mutually agree as follows:

A. Particularized Terms

1. Counts Pleading To

The defendant shall enter a plea of guilty to Counts Two, Four, and Six of the Indictment, which charge the defendant with making biological agent and toxin hoaxes, in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 1038(a)(1) and (a)(1)(A).

2. Maximum Penalties

Counts Two, Four, and Six each carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment, a fine of \$250,000, a term of supervised release of not more than three years, and a special assessment of \$100 per felony count. With respect to certain offenses, the Court shall order the defendant to make

Defendant's Initials 

restitution to any victim of the offenses, and with respect to other offenses, the Court may order the defendant to make restitution to any victim of the offenses, or to the community, as set forth below.

3. Elements of the Offenses

The defendant acknowledges understanding the nature and elements of the offenses with which defendant has been charged and to which defendant is pleading guilty. The elements of Counts Two, Four, and Six, as applied to this case, are:

First: The defendant intentionally conveyed false or misleading information;

Second: The information was conveyed under circumstances where such information may reasonably be believed; and

Third: If true, the information would have indicated that an activity had taken, was taking, or would take place that would constitute a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2332a, involving weapons of mass destruction and biological weapons.

4. Counts Dismissed

At the time of sentencing, the remaining counts against the defendant, Counts One, Three, and Five, will be dismissed pursuant to Fed.

R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(A).

5. No Further Charges

If the Court accepts this plea agreement, the United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida agrees not to charge defendant with committing any other federal criminal offenses known to the United States Attorney's Office at the time of the execution of this agreement and related to the conduct described herein.

6. Mandatory Restitution to Victim of Offense of Conviction

Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3663A(a) and (b) defendant agrees to make full restitution to the victims as determined by the Court.

7. Guidelines Sentence

Pursuant to Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(B), the United States will recommend to the Court that the defendant be sentenced within the defendant's applicable guidelines range as determined by the Court pursuant to the United States Sentencing Guidelines, as adjusted by any departure the United States has agreed to recommend in this plea agreement. The parties understand that such a recommendation is not binding on the Court and that, if it is not accepted by this Court, neither the United States nor the defendant will be allowed to withdraw from the plea agreement, and the defendant will not be allowed to withdraw from the plea of guilty.

8. Acceptance of Responsibility - Three Levels

At the time of sentencing, and in the event that no adverse information is received suggesting such a recommendation to be unwarranted, the United States will not oppose the defendant's request to the Court that the defendant receive a two-level downward adjustment for acceptance of responsibility, pursuant to USSG § 3E1.1(a). The defendant understands that this recommendation or request is not binding on the Court, and if not accepted by the Court, the defendant will not be allowed to withdraw from the plea.

Further, at the time of sentencing, if the defendant's offense level prior to operation of subsection (a) is level 16 or greater, and if the defendant complies with the provisions of USSG § 3E1.1(b) and all terms of this Plea Agreement, including but not limited to, the timely submission of the financial affidavit referenced in Paragraph B.5., the United States agrees to file a motion pursuant to USSG § 3E1.1(b) for a downward adjustment of one additional level. The defendant understands that the determination as to whether the defendant has qualified for a downward adjustment of a third level for acceptance of responsibility rests solely with the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, and the defendant agrees that the defendant cannot

Defendant's Initials MS

and will not challenge that determination, whether by appeal, collateral attack, or otherwise.

B. Standard Terms and Conditions

1. Restitution, Special Assessment and Fine

The defendant understands and agrees that the Court, in addition to or in lieu of any other penalty, shall order the defendant to make restitution to any victim of the offenses, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3663A, for all offenses described in 18 U.S.C. § 3663A(c)(1); and the Court may order the defendant to make restitution to any victim of the offenses, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3663, including restitution as to all counts charged, whether or not the defendant enters a plea of guilty to such counts, and whether or not such counts are dismissed pursuant to this agreement. The defendant further understands that compliance with any restitution payment plan imposed by the Court in no way precludes the United States from simultaneously pursuing other statutory remedies for collecting restitution (28 U.S.C. § 3003(b)(2)), including, but not limited to, garnishment and execution, pursuant to the Mandatory Victims Restitution Act, in order to ensure that the defendant's restitution obligation is satisfied.

On each count to which a plea of guilty is entered, the Court shall impose a special assessment pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3013. To ensure

that this obligation is satisfied, the Defendant agrees to deliver a cashier's check, certified check or money order to the Clerk of the Court in the amount of \$300, payable to "Clerk, U.S. District Court" within ten days of the change of plea hearing.

The defendant understands that this agreement imposes no limitation as to fine.

2. Supervised Release

The defendant understands that the offenses to which the defendant is pleading provide for imposition of a term of supervised release upon release from imprisonment, and that, if the defendant should violate the conditions of release, the defendant would be subject to a further term of imprisonment.

3. Immigration Consequences of Pleading Guilty

The defendant has been advised and understands that, upon conviction, a defendant who is not a United States citizen may be removed from the United States, denied citizenship, and denied admission to the United States in the future.

4. Sentencing Information

The United States reserves its right and obligation to report to the Court and the United States Probation Office all information concerning the

Defendant's Initials MS

background, character, and conduct of the defendant, to provide relevant factual information, including the totality of the defendant's criminal activities, if any, not limited to the counts to which defendant pleads, to respond to comments made by the defendant or defendant's counsel, and to correct any misstatements or inaccuracies. The United States further reserves its right to make any recommendations it deems appropriate regarding the disposition of this case, subject to any limitations set forth herein, if any.

5. Financial Disclosures

Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3664(d)(3) and Fed. R. Crim. P. 32(d)(2)(A)(ii), the defendant agrees to complete and submit to the United States Attorney's Office within 30 days of execution of this agreement an affidavit reflecting the defendant's financial condition. The defendant promises that her financial statement and disclosures will be complete, accurate and truthful and will include all assets in which she has any interest or over which the defendant exercises control, directly or indirectly, including those held by a spouse, dependent, nominee or other third party. The defendant further agrees to execute any documents requested by the United States needed to obtain from any third parties any records of assets owned by the defendant, directly or through a nominee, and, by the execution of this Plea Agreement, consents to the release of the defendant's tax returns for the

previous five years. The defendant similarly agrees and authorizes the United States Attorney's Office to provide to, and obtain from, the United States Probation Office, the financial affidavit, any of the defendant's federal, state, and local tax returns, bank records and any other financial information concerning the defendant, for the purpose of making any recommendations to the Court and for collecting any assessments, fines, restitution, or forfeiture ordered by the Court. The defendant expressly authorizes the United States Attorney's Office to obtain current credit reports in order to evaluate the defendant's ability to satisfy any financial obligation imposed by the Court.

6. Sentencing Recommendations

It is understood by the parties that the Court is neither a party to nor bound by this agreement. The Court may accept or reject the agreement, or defer a decision until it has had an opportunity to consider the presentence report prepared by the United States Probation Office. The defendant understands and acknowledges that, although the parties are permitted to make recommendations and present arguments to the Court, the sentence will be determined solely by the Court, with the assistance of the United States Probation Office. Defendant further understands and acknowledges that any discussions between defendant or defendant's attorney and the attorney or other agents for the government regarding any recommendations by the

government are not binding on the Court and that, should any recommendations be rejected, defendant will not be permitted to withdraw defendant's plea pursuant to this plea agreement. The government expressly reserves the right to support and defend any decision that the Court may make with regard to the defendant's sentence, whether or not such decision is consistent with the government's recommendations contained herein.

7. Defendant's Waiver of Right to Appeal the Sentence

The defendant agrees that this Court has jurisdiction and authority to impose any sentence up to the statutory maximum and expressly waives the right to appeal defendant's sentence on any ground, including the ground that the Court erred in determining the applicable guidelines range pursuant to the United States Sentencing Guidelines, except (a) the ground that the sentence exceeds the defendant's applicable guidelines range as determined by the Court pursuant to the United States Sentencing Guidelines; (b) the ground that the sentence exceeds the statutory maximum penalty; or (c) the ground that the sentence violates the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution; provided, however, that if the government exercises its right to appeal the sentence imposed, as authorized by 18 U.S.C. § 3742(b), then the defendant is released from his waiver and may appeal the sentence as authorized by 18 U.S.C. § 3742(a).

8. Middle District of Florida Agreement

It is further understood that this agreement is limited to the Office of the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida and cannot bind other federal, state, or local prosecuting authorities, although this office will bring defendant's cooperation, if any, to the attention of other prosecuting officers or others, if requested.

9. Filing of Agreement

This agreement shall be presented to the Court, in open court or in camera, in whole or in part, upon a showing of good cause, and filed in this cause, at the time of defendant's entry of a plea of guilty pursuant hereto.

10. Voluntariness

The defendant acknowledges that defendant is entering into this agreement and is pleading guilty freely and voluntarily without reliance upon any discussions between the attorney for the government and the defendant and defendant's attorney and without promise of benefit of any kind (other than the concessions contained herein), and without threats, force, intimidation, or coercion of any kind. The defendant further acknowledges defendant's understanding of the nature of the offense or offenses to which defendant is pleading guilty and the elements thereof, including the penalties provided by law, and defendant's complete satisfaction with the representation

and advice received from defendant's undersigned counsel (if any). The defendant also understands that defendant has the right to plead not guilty or to persist in that plea if it has already been made, and that defendant has the right to be tried by a jury with the assistance of counsel, the right to confront and cross-examine the witnesses against defendant, the right against compulsory self-incrimination, and the right to compulsory process for the attendance of witnesses to testify in defendant's defense; but, by pleading guilty, defendant waives or gives up those rights and there will be no trial. The defendant further understands that if defendant pleads guilty, the Court may ask defendant questions about the offense or offenses to which defendant pleaded, and if defendant answers those questions under oath, on the record, and in the presence of counsel (if any), defendant's answers may later be used against defendant in a prosecution for perjury or false statement. The defendant also understands that defendant will be adjudicated guilty of the offenses to which defendant has pleaded and, if any of such offenses are felonies, may thereby be deprived of certain rights, such as the right to vote, to hold public office, to serve on a jury, or to have possession of firearms.

11. Factual Basis

Defendant is pleading guilty because defendant is in fact guilty. The defendant certifies that defendant does hereby admit that the facts set

Defendant's Initials MS

forth below are true, and were this case to go to trial, the United States would be able to prove those specific facts and others beyond a reasonable doubt.

FACTS

Beginning in August 2018, the defendant, Maria Bassi Lauro, a former elementary-school teacher, began sending hateful letters containing a then-unknown threatening powder to elementary schools throughout central Florida and at which she had worked. The defendant sent each of the powder mailings from the Middle District of Florida.

On or about August 13, 2018, the defendant sent a white-powder letter to an administrator at the Citrus Ridge Academy in Davenport, Florida. When the administrator opened the mailing, she found white powder and the following note: "Your punishment for being a fat, ugly asshole." The administrator believed that the letter contained a deadly toxin and called law enforcement. A Polk County HAZMAT team responded to the school, along with personnel from the FBI and Florida Department of Health.

On or about September 24, 2018, the defendant sent a white-powder letter to an administrator at the Groveland Elementary School in Groveland, Florida. When the administrator opened the mailing, he found white powder and the following note: "Your punishment for being an ugly asshole." The administrator believed that the letter contained a deadly toxin,

notified the school principal, and called 911. HAZMAT-trained personnel from the FBI and other law-enforcement agencies responded to the school.

On or about September 28, 2018, the defendant sent a white-powder letter to a teacher at the Four Corners Charter School in Davenport, Florida. When the teacher opened the mailing, she found white powder and the following note: "Your punishment for being a fat ugly asshole." The teacher believed that the letter contained a deadly toxin and called for law-enforcement assistance. The Osceola County Fire Department and an Orange County HAZMAT team responded, along with personnel from the FBI.

Then, on or about December 12, 2018, the defendant sent a white-powder letter to an administrator at the Laurel Elementary School in Poinciana, Florida. When the administrator opened the mailing, she found a bluish-powder and a blank piece of paper. After the administrator called 911, HAZMAT-trained personnel from the FBI and other law-enforcement agencies responded to the school.

Before sending the threatening letters, the defendant had worked as an elementary-school teacher at, and effectively had been fired for poor performance from, each of the schools that received her mailings. Moreover, each of the individually named victim-recipients had played a role in her performance reviews and/or termination from each of the schools.

Ultimately, the FBI determined that each of the mailings contained sodium bicarbonate, which is more commonly known as baking soda. In addition, the FBI found the defendant's DNA and/or fingerprints on the mailings she had sent to the Citrus Ridge Academy, Groveland Elementary, and Four Corners Charter School.

The defendant sent each of the above-described mailings because she was upset with each victim and school. In addition, the defendant sent the mailings with the intent to threaten and cause each victim to believe that he or she had been exposed to a deadly biological toxin. Use of an actual biological toxin in such a manner violates 18 U.S.C. § 2332a.

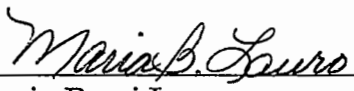
12. Entire Agreement

This plea agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the government and the defendant with respect to the aforementioned guilty plea and no other promises, agreements, or representations exist or have been made to the defendant or defendant's attorney with regard to such guilty plea.

13. Certification

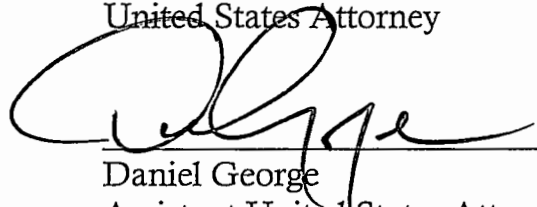
The defendant and defendant's counsel certify that this plea agreement has been read in its entirety by (or has been read to) the defendant and that defendant fully understands its terms.

DATED this 26th day of February, 2021.

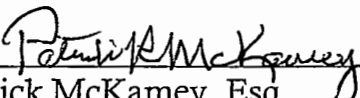


Maria Bassi Lauro
Defendant

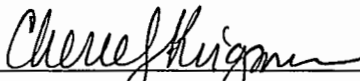
MARIA CHAPA LOPEZ
United States Attorney



Daniel George
Assistant United States Attorney



Patrick McKamey, Esq.
Attorney for Defendant



Cherie L. Kringsman
Assistant United States Attorney
Chief, National Security and
Cybercrimes Section