



U. S. Department of Justice

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**GAINESVILLE MAN CONVICTED OF
DRUG TRAFFICKING AND FIREARM OFFENSE**

GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA – A federal jury in Gainesville convicted Edwin Giovanni Mendoza-Verdugo, 20, of Sinaloa, Mexico, on one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, further finding Mendoza-Verdugo responsible for 40-400 grams of fentanyl, and one count of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking offense. The guilty verdict, returned at the conclusion of a three-day trial, was announced by Jason R. Coody, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida.

Evidence introduced during the trial revealed Mendoza-Verdugo, along with co-conspirators Helio Rolando Lopez-Elizalde and Jorge Mario Velasquez, conspired to possess with intent to distribute fentanyl pills throughout the Northern District of Florida and elsewhere. The Drug Enforcement Administration, based on a tip from the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, began investigating Mendoza-Verdugo and his co-conspirators in April of 2022.

After conducting surveillance, the DEA and ACSO seized fentanyl pills, disguised as marked Oxycodone pills, as well as two pistols, from the three conspirators as part of a traffic interdiction in Alachua County, Florida. Further investigation led to the discovery of a shared hotel room where Mendoza-Verdugo and his co-conspirators stored additional fentanyl pills, an AR-15 style rifle, and multiple boxes of ammunition. Co-conspirators Lopez-Elizalde and Velasquez pled guilty prior to trial and are currently awaiting sentencing.

Mendoza-Verdugo's sentencing hearing is scheduled for March 21, 2023, at 10:00 a.m., at the United States Courthouse in Gainesville before United States District Judge Allen C. Winsor. Mendoza-Verdugo faces 10 to 60 years imprisonment, 4 years to life supervised release, and a fine of up to \$5,250,000.

This conviction resulted from an investigation by the Drug Enforcement Administration. Assistant United States Attorney David P. Byron prosecuted the case.

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