

## Community Report



## Western Washington



I am pleased to provide this update of the good work underway in the Western District of Washington. Our priorities continue to include keeping communities safe, protecting civil rights, defending government agencies in litigation, and working on crime prevention strategies including improving reentry for those involved in the criminal justice system.

Our focus remains protecting our community from violent crime: carjackings, home invasion robberies, and child sexual abuse, and from financial crimes such as frauds against the elderly, Ponzi schemes, and money laundering.

It was in our district that the crypto exchange Binance paid \$4.3 billion dollars for failing to institute money laundering protections. This failure allowed funds to go to terrorists, cybercriminals, and child abusers, and to recipients in Iran, North Korea, and other sanctioned countries.

After nearly a year of work and collaboration with the Federal Court and the Federal Public Defender's Office we will be the first District in the country to launch a federal pre-trial diversion mental health court. The goal is to take those whose crime is driven by mental health challenges and get them the care they need. Those eligible for this court, dubbed "PATHWAY," will have their charges dismissed if they successfully complete a 12 to 24-month period of treatment and federal supervision.

We also are expanding the drug court program in Western Washington. The current program results in the dismissal of charges if the defendant successfully completes treatment and all the requirements of the program. The expansion is intended to reach a broader group of potential participants with more criminal history. Their successful

completion of all requirements will result in a reduced sentence.

Our Civil Division continues to work on civil rights matters, including robust enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Our district is a leader in improving health care compliance with the [ADA for those who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing](#). Just last month we settled allegations with MultiCare Health systems that they had failed to provide appropriate interpreter services.

While we are thousands of miles away from “the other Washington,” we are honored when department leadership comes to Western Washington to learn more about our work. Last March, Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco visited our office, meeting with our staff, law enforcement leaders, and tribal partners.



And in October, Attorney General Merrick Garland came to Seattle to hear from our law enforcement partners and meet with our staff about the excellent work done here.

This report highlights some of our work in the Western District of Washington. I want to thank the people of my office who work hard each day to pursue justice and keep our communities safe. And of course, key to all our efforts are the partnerships we have with law enforcement and community groups, all working together to improve life here in Washington.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tessa M. Gorman".

U.S. Attorney Tessa M. Gorman

## Community safety – Twin threats of firearms and fentanyl

Federal law enforcement works tirelessly to stem the flow of potentially deadly fentanyl into Western Washington. Our cases focus on cartel-connected organizations, violent drug traffickers, and those having a dramatic impact on our communities.

The Criminal Enterprises Unit leads investigations of transnational and regional drug trafficking organizations. Whether the traffickers are operating in the urban core or in our rural communities, law enforcement makes stopping the flow of deadly fentanyl a top priority. At right are some of the blue fentanyl pills seized in the district.



In November, the Pierce County couple who led a drug trafficking organization connected to an Aryan prison gang, [pledaded guilty to trafficking fentanyl, meth, and other drugs](#). Law enforcement seized nearly 2 million doses of fentanyl and more than 225 firearms – some shown at left. The leader of the drug ring faces more than 17 years in prison.

In October, one of the largest arrest operations in Homeland Security Investigations history, [a dozen people were indicted in connection with a violent drug trafficking ring operating in Seattle's University District](#).

One trafficker was killed and a second defendant was tied to a deadly shooting at a hookah bar in downtown Seattle. One of the seized firearms is shown at right.



Also in October, five members of one King County family [were indicted in connection with trafficking deadly fentanyl](#). Some of the pills were tied to overdoses on the Lummi Nation Indian reservation.



In July, a former Rhode Island man was convicted of attempting to smuggle more than 50 pounds of fentanyl and two pounds of fentanyl powder across the Strait of Juan de Fuca and into Canada. The drugs were discovered by beachcombers near Port Angles and were turned over to law enforcement. A fast moving investigation [linked the duffle bags to John Michael Sherwood](#),

[who was also convicted of international money laundering](#). He is scheduled for sentencing in January 2025.



## **Gun crime and violent crimes**

Two men were [indicted for Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations \(RICO\) crimes for targeting Asian families for home invasion robberies](#) – one of which was deadly. The men impersonated police officers kicking in doors and detaining homeowners and their children at gunpoint. Trial in the case is scheduled for October 2025.

The Carjacking Task Force led by Seattle and Kent Police Departments, the FBI, and our office, actively reviews carjacking incidents for possible federal charges. [A man who carjacked a vehicle near Seattle's Lumen field was charged federally](#). So too was murder suspect Salman Subeyr Haji, who had carjacked a woman on Seattle's Queen Anne Hill. Haji, who [allegedly shot and killed a woman in the Tukwila Costco parking lot is believed to be overseas](#).



A Kent, Washington man [who trafficked more than 130 guns as a 'straw purchaser'](#) [was sentenced to three years in prison](#). Fifty-four of the guns that Dion Jamar Cooper purchased and illegally sold to others have been linked to crimes such as armed robberies, carjacking, drive-by shootings and even one

homicide. The firearm connected to the homicide is shown above.

## **Hate Crimes**

An Olympia man was [sentenced to eleven years in prison for attacking Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls](#) with fire and gunfire. The Olympia Hall was destroyed in the arson – shown at right.

A Texas woman was [indicted for the arson that](#)



[destroyed a Snohomish County Lutheran church.](#)

A Thurston County man was [sentenced to 30 months in prison for threatening a Black Social Security employee](#) and using racial slurs.

## **Sexual Assault and Child Sexual Abuse Material**

A [42-year-old Florida man was sentenced to 20 years in prison](#) for producing sexual images of a child and traveling across the country to sexually assault a 14-year-old girl.

A [49-year-old Portland Man who is a registered sex offender was sentenced to 25 years in prison](#). The defendant traveled to the Seattle area believing he would have sex with a 5-year-old – he had been communicating with an undercover officer.

In October, [a former Seattle tech worker was sentenced to 30 years in prison](#) for sexually abusing an 11-year-old and operating a website devoted to incest and child abuse. The woman was convicted following a 4-day trial in March 2023.

Our cases involving sexual assault on aircraft continued with six different defendants sentenced to prison terms. The [sentences ranged from 6 months in prison to 15 months](#) in prison for sexually assaulting other passengers on aircraft headed to Seattle. Many of the [victims in these cases are minors](#). A [41-year-old Claremont California man who was convicted at trial in October 2024 will be sentenced](#) for his assault on an 18-year-old next month.

## **Public Corruption**

A former King County Jail Guard [was sentenced to more than eight years in prison for accepting bribes](#) to smuggle drugs into the King County Jail. In a related case that arose from the investigation, prosecutors are handling the case of a [Western Washington defense lawyer accused of smuggling drugs into the jail](#) – one time in a hidden compartment in shoes as in photo at right.



## **Human Trafficking**

In April, the owner of a [Vashon Island landscaping business was sentenced to 20 years in prison](#) for human trafficking, labor trafficking and money laundering. The properties the defendant owned on the island were forfeited to the government.

In October, [a 32-year-old Hemet, California man pleaded guilty to sex trafficking and illegal firearms possession](#). The defendant beat a woman he sex trafficked, chasing her on Aurora Avenue North and firing a gun. Winston Cornell Burt faces a 15-year prison term when he is sentenced on March 10, 2025.

## COVID-19 Fraud

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Washington has been a leader in prosecuting defendants who used fraud to steal Covid-19 benefits. Our office led the way in the prosecution of those committing fraud on a rental assistance program. In March, [the leader of a \\$6.8 million pandemic fraud ring was sentenced to five years in prison](#). She used the money for luxury travel, jewelry, shopping sprees and even plastic surgery in Colombia. She documented her spending on social media – at right and below.

A Canadian resident who is a Nigerian citizen [was sentenced in March to 42 months in prison](#) for defrauding pandemic programs of more than \$1 million. [Co-defendant Fatu Ismaila Lawal pleaded guilty in September](#) and will be sentenced January 28, 2025.

A former Seattle man who fraudulently obtained \$500,000 in COVID pandemic benefits [was sentenced in May to 42 months in prison](#). He submitted falsified documents claiming he had businesses that qualified for the Paycheck Protection Program. The false applications stole funds that could have been used by other, legitimate businesses.

## Tax and Economic Crimes

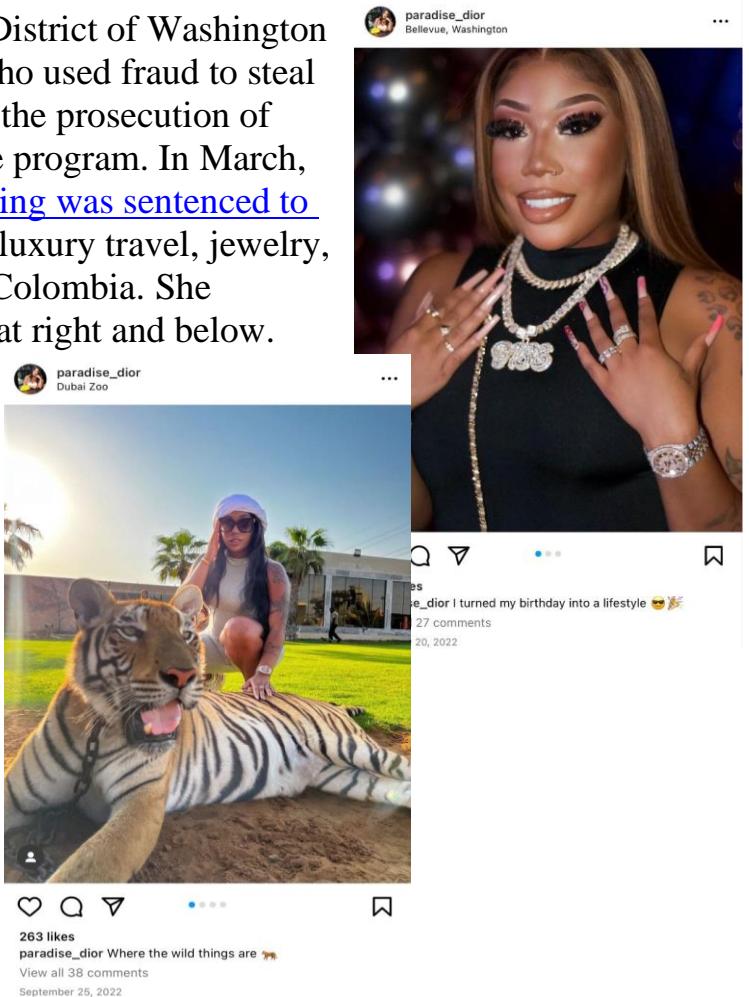
The owner of a string of “bikini barista” coffee stands was [sentenced to nine months in prison](#), fined \$75,000 and ordered to pay \$1.3 million for failing to report some \$6 million in income on his taxes.



Two [Irish brothers who defrauded elderly homeowners across the country and in Western Washington were sentenced to 18 months in prison](#).

The two claimed the homeowners needed urgent foundation work and dug useless trenches such as the one at left to lock victims into paying exorbitant fees.

A [Kirkland contractor who defrauded customers of approximately \\$4 million was sentenced to four years in prison](#). Joseph D. Bergevin used forged invoices to take money from customers claiming it was to pay subcontractors up front and get better pricing. Instead, he took the money and little or no work was completed.



In two different investigations, the grand jury returned indictments for “refund fraud” - an online crime where perpetrators order high value goods, keep the items, and then claim a refund saying the item didn’t arrive or was damaged. In one case the fraudsters allegedly abused the return system by claiming to return the item by mail for an electronic refund, and then taking the item to a brick-and-mortar store to receive a second refund.

In June a family of [five sisters was charged with a second scheme, defrauding an athleticwear vendor of more than \\$1million](#). The case is scheduled for trial in September 2025.

In December 2024, the [developer of the “Simple Refunds” Telegram channel was sentenced to three years in prison](#) for his leadership role in a \$4.3 million dollar fraud. Sajed Al-Maarej recruited others to join his fake refunding scheme for a cut of the money they illegally obtained. Items such as the Go Kart at right were some of the high-end goods purchased and then the customer falsely asked for a refund.

Two men who ran a multimillion dollar business purchasing stolen goods and selling them online via Amazon and eBay [were indicted in July](#) and are scheduled for trial in September 2025. The men operated out of a storefront in Burien selling more than \$4.5 million of stolen goods online. When law enforcement served search warrants, they seized more than 74,000 stolen items worth \$2.4 million.



## Cybercrime

The Western District of Washington led the way in prosecution of “swatting” – calling in a false emergency report so that law enforcement races to a home or business when a crime has falsely been reported. In June 21-year-old [Ashton Connor Garcia of Bremerton, Washington was sentenced to three years in prison](#) for his extensive illegal harassing activity. Garcia pleaded guilty to placing more than 20 false emergency reports to law

enforcement agencies across the U.S. and Canada. In some instances, Garcia place the swatting calls after blackmailing teens for money or sexually explicit photos.

Expertise from Western District prosecutors was critical to building the case against a [California teen who made hundreds of swatting calls across the U.S.](#) 18-year-old Alan Filon of Lancaster, CA admitted one of the victims of his conduct was a high school in northwest Washington.

In May 2024, two Estonian men who were indicted in November 2022, [were extradited and arraigned in the Western District of Washington](#). The two are accused of a \$575 million Ponzi scheme.

## **Environmental Crime**

The owners of a Ridgefield automotive shop that removed federally required emissions control equipment from Diesel trucks were convicted [and sentenced in November to home confinement, probation, community service and each must pay a \\$10,000 fine](#). Some of the removed and replacement tailpipes are at right.



In a similar case, a New Jersey man [pledged guilty in November](#) to removing the pollution control software on hundreds of vehicles nationwide. The conduct means that such truck pollute 30-1200 times more than diesel trucks with the legally configured pollution controls on them.

## **Indian Country**

Our work with our 25 tribal communities is critically important.

In July, [a member of the Tulalip Tribes pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter](#) for the fatal shooting in a garage on tribal land. 38-year-old Abdul Qasim Ray Zahir is scheduled for sentencing on March 7, 2025.

The former Executive Director of a tribal non-profit, that was supposed to provide employment training for tribal members, [was sentenced to five months in custody for embezzling nearly \\$100,000 in federal funds](#). Debbie Rawle used the funds for home improvements, furniture, clothes and motorcycle accessories.

A 49-year-old member of the Lummi Nation [will be sentenced in February 2025 for the domestic violence assault on his intimate partner](#). Jason Sieber Jr. He struck his partner

repeatedly in the face and head and kept her from leaving the home to get help.

The Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) continues to fund tribal efforts to deter and address domestic violence in tribal communities. [This year more than \\$4.5 million was directed to Western Washington Tribes](#) and a statewide tribal non-profit to improve services for victims of domestic violence. The grants pay for housing, legal services, transportation, and education.

## **Civil Division and Financial Litigation Program**

The Civil Division continues to defend federal agencies and employees in some 360 matters filed in 2024, in filings ranging from medical malpractice, tort, immigration, employment, Freedom of Information (FOIA), and Administrative Procedures Act (APA). The Civil Division also affirmatively files suit over civil rights violations or civil fraud on the government.

The Financial Litigation Program handles legal proceedings to enforce criminal fines, restitution orders, and civil judgments. In fiscal year 2024, the office collected more than \$1.5 billion in criminal debts (restitution to victims of crime), and \$11.4 million in civil debts. The total criminal collections of \$1,509,384,065 includes 1.5 billion paid in the historic Binance prosecution for violating anti-money laundering statutes.

## **Civil Rights**

Our Civil Rights team settled several matters related to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) by getting a wide variety of organizations to update their services or physical spaces to ensure access. In a landmark settlement with [Washington State Parks, the agency has agreed to make alterations and repairs to all the state parks that fail to comply with ADA regulations](#). The investigation was prompted by a complainant who was injured when he encountered deep ruts at a camping space that was supposed to be for those with disabilities.

MultiCare Health system and PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center in Vancouver, Washington each resolved allegations they failed to provide appropriate interpreter services for those who are deaf and/or deaf blind. [MultiCare is establishing a \\$2 million fund to compensate those who may have experienced this violation of the ADA](#). The medical system is making changes to ensure appropriate interpreter systems are in place going forward. Similarly, [PeaceHealth will also make changes to ensure appropriate interpreter services for those who need them](#). The complainant in the PeaceHealth matter will receive \$75,000 for the ADA violation.

DOJ [resolved an ADA matter with the Mason County Jail](#) regarding treatment of Opioid Use Disorder (OID). The jail will provide appropriate medications to treat the disorder.

And an [eating disorder treatment provider resolved claims](#) that it had refused to allow a patient to make modifications to the program based on her health needs.

The Civil Rights team continues to monitor policing reforms implemented by the City of Seattle under the 2012 consent decree. In late 2024, U.S. District Judge James L. Robart indicated he had seen progress on the remaining issues of the consent decree and may be ready to terminate the consent decree in 2025.

## **False Claims Act**

Our Affirmative Civil Enforcement attorneys reached settlements with various entities and individuals that falsely billed the government or improperly accessed government programs. This includes a medical doctor who improperly billed government health programs. [A Tacoma hospital as well as Orthopedic Surgeon Kevin Schoenfelder paid the government for performing and billing for surgeries that were not medically necessary.](#) Schoenfelder, who has since retired, paid \$197,054 and CHI Franciscan Health paid \$745,654 to resolve the matter.

[Evergreen Treatment Services paid \\$1.4 million to resolve claims it double-billed the government for drug treatment services.](#) These double billings totaled \$726,991. Evergreen paid \$1,453,982 to resolve the case.

Similarly, Daiya Healthcare, PLLC, a multi-specialty medical care provider who contracts with skilled nursing facilities, paid the government \$6.5 million dollars to resolve allegations that it violated the False Claims Act. The United States alleged that Daiya routinely billed government payors for services at higher levels than provided and overbilled the government for telephone visits and non face-to-face services.

Yakima Products Inc., an Oregon company that manufactures and sells automobile accessories, [paid \\$3 million to resolve allegations that it knowingly failed to pay required antidumping and countervailing duties on extruded aluminum components](#) imported from the People's Republic of China (PRC). According to the settlement agreement, Yakima failed to pay the duties it owed from January 1, 2012, through July 5, 2021, including after being informed of the need to pay the duties.

And finally, a company that improperly obtained a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan agreed to pay the government \$989,438 to resolve the allegations. The company, [Docklight Brands LLC, was not eligible for the loan because its business involves marijuana,](#) which remains illegal under federal law. The payment is for double the amount of the \$494,719, loan or \$989,438 in total. The Affirmative Civil Enforcement team continues to investigate a large number of COVID-19 fraud cases, many of which involve PPP loans.

## In the community

Members of the U.S. Attorney's Office are active in our community, working with students, presenting at workshops and bar association meetings. Below are just a few of the engagements we've worked on this year.

Our Human Resources staff attend job fairs to encourage members of the public to consider a career with the U.S. Attorney's Office. The event, pictured at right, was sponsored by the WA State Dept of Services for the Blind and WA State DSHS. The fair was for all, but with an emphasis on individuals with disabilities and veterans.



At left, U.S. Attorney Gorman interviews former DOJ leader Vanita Gupta about her distinguished career at our annual office open house.

Below, Civil Division attorneys lead a discussion on False Claims cases.





At left, Assistant U.S. Attorney Cindy Chang is a featured speaker at the Washington State “Championing Women in Law Enforcement Conference” on June 14, 2024, at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission in Burien.

AUSA Jonas Lerman is a sought-after speaker around the world on digital assets and money laundering. Pictured here in Morocco and Cambodia.



AUSAs Jin Kim and Yunah Chung led a panel on “Pathways to Finding Meaningful Work in the Public Sector” at the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA).

At right, AUSAs Jessica Manca, Erica Evans and Susan Kas speak at a United Against Hate presentation to the NAACP of King County.



AUSAs Lauren Staniar and Katie Fairchild present to seniors in Des Moines about common scams targeting older adults, red flags, reporting, and prevention measures.



Our Civil Division presented information on Elder Fraud at the Filipino Community Center. They used DOJ's Fraud Bingo game to engage the community with important warnings about how to spot a fraud scheme.



U.S. Attorney Gorman is prioritizing consultation with all 25 tribes in Western Washington. Below are a few of her most recent visits.



Above, Tribal Liaisons and U.S. Attorney Gorman with leaders of the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians.

At right Tribal Liaison Tate London and U.S. Attorney Gorman with members of the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

Below, leaders of the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation with U.S. Attorney Gorman, AUSA London, and FBI agents.





Above, U.S. Attorney Gorman and members of the FBI with the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe.

At right, U.S. Attorney Gorman with leaders of the Skokomish Indian Tribe. Below, the Blessing of the fleet at the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community.

