

Former Border Patrol Agent Sentenced to 18 Years in Prison for Drug Smuggling and Bribery

Friday, April 12, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Arizona

TUCSON, Ariz. – Carlos Victor Passapera Pinott, 56, of Buckeye, was sentenced last week by United States District Judge Jennifer G. Zipp to 18 years in prison, followed by five years of supervised release. Passapera pleaded guilty to Bribery of a Public Official and Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine, Fentanyl, and Heroin on June 23, 2023.

On August 9, 2020, while working as a United States Border Patrol Agent, Passapera drove his Border Patrol vehicle into the desert, west of the Lukeville Port of Entry, and retrieved two large duffel bags. Passapera then changed vehicles and transported the duffel bags to the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, where he parked and loaded the bags into the vehicle of a co-conspirator. The co-conspirator was stopped by law enforcement shortly after leaving the airport parking lot. A search of the two duffel bags revealed multiple packages of cocaine, fentanyl, and heroin. Approximately 21 kilograms of cocaine, one kilogram of fentanyl, and one kilogram of heroin were seized. An additional \$311,100 in U.S. currency was seized from Passapera's safe deposit box. Passapera admitted to accepting large cash payments in exchange for using his position to smuggle drugs.

"Defendant Passapera has betrayed his Border Patrol colleagues," said United States Attorney Gary Restaino. "The Border Patrol has earned the trust of a grateful nation for its exemplary efforts to protect the border and to humanely process the migrants who come to America for a better life. Defendant's actions threaten that trust, and violated his oath to faithfully discharge his duties as a law enforcement officer."

"The citizens of Arizona are the true victims of this crime. Passapera was a trusted agent who took an oath to protect our border and keep drugs out. He broke that oath when he chose money over honor to transport and distribute drugs in this country," said FBI Phoenix Special Agent in Charge Akil Davis. "We hope this sentence demonstrates that corruption does not pay, and the FBI will continue to investigate and pursue those who abuse their positions."

“A Border Patrol agent using his position to smuggle fentanyl and heroin into the United States is unconscionable” said DHS Inspector General, Dr. Joseph V. Cuffari. “Today’s sentencing sends a clear message that government officials who betray the people they are meant to protect are held accountable.”

Two individuals pleaded guilty in 2022 and were sentenced for Bribery of a Public Official charges related to this case. Omar Natalio Martinez Fontes pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Bribery and Alien Smuggling. Fontes received time served after serving over two years in custody (CR-21-00792-TUC-JGZ). Luis Alfredo Quintero-Gonzalez also pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Bribery and Alien Smuggling. Quintero-Gonzalez received time served after serving over 22 months in custody (CR-21-01529-TUC-JGZ).

The investigation was conducted primarily by the Southern Arizona Border Corruption Task Force (composed of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, Homeland Security Investigations Office of Professional Responsibility, Department of Homeland Security Office of Professional Responsibility, and Tucson Police Department), Drug Enforcement Administration, Native Task Force, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, and Surprise Police Department. The United States Attorney’s Office, District of Arizona, Tucson, handled the prosecution.

CASE NUMBER: CR-20-01706-TUC-JGZ

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