

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of New Hampshire

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, August 1, 2019

Former FCI-Berlin Chaplain Sentenced to 40 Months for Accepting Bribes to Smuggle Drugs into Prison

CONCORD - Joseph Buenviaje, 53, of Berlin, was sentenced to serve 40 months for accepting bribes from inmates and providing contraband in prison, United States Attorney Scott W. Murray announced today.

According to court documents and statements made in court, Buenviaje began working as a chaplain at the Federal Correctional Institution in Berlin, New Hampshire in 2015. From April of 2018 until he was caught in November of 2018, Buenviaje smuggled drugs (including Suboxone, synthetic cannabinoids and marijuana) cellular telephones, tobacco, and other contraband into the prison in exchange for bribe payments. When interviewed by investigators in November 2018, Buenviaje admitted that he had been smuggling drugs and other contraband into the prison once or twice per week. In exchange, Buenviaje received over \$52,000 in bribe payments.

Buenviaje received the contraband and some of the bribe payments by mail addressed to his ministry. Buenviaje received Suboxone—an opioid ordinarily prescribed to treat drug addiction—in its original packaging. Upon receipt, Buenviaje repackaged the drug in cellophane for distribution in the prison. Buenviaje also received notebooks with drug-soaked pages that he smuggled into the prison. After smuggling items he received into the prison, Buenviaje placed the contraband in a cabinet in the prison chapel where inmates would later retrieve the items.

In November 2018, on the day of his arrest, investigators found 111 Suboxone strips, some of which were in Buenviaje's car and some of which were in Buenviaje's chaplain office repackaged for distribution. Investigators also located multiple notebooks that Buenviaje had hidden in a cabinet in his office for an inmate. Some pages in the notebooks had been soaked with unlawful synthetic cannabinoids, specifically FUB-AMB and 5F-ADB. These drugs are known to cause serious side effects, including death.

Buenviaje previously pleaded guilty on April 30, 2019.

"This defendant's conduct constituted a massive breach of trust," said U.S. Attorney Murray. "The defendant sought to profit from his position as a prison chaplain by smuggling drugs and other contraband into a federal prison. These reprehensible acts endangered the safety of the inmates and staff at FCI-Berlin. The defendant deserves the substantial prison sentence that he received for his unlawful and unethical conduct."

"While serving in his capacity as a chaplain, Buenviaje was supposed to provide religious counseling to inmates," said Guido Modano, Special Agent in Charge, Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, New York Field Office. "Instead, he devised a self-serving scheme to collect bribes in exchange for smuggling contraband, including dangerous drugs, into the prison, and he also utilized the prison chapel to carry out his scheme. He will fittingly serve time for his actions, which placed inmates, correctional officers, and other prison staff in harm's way, and threatened the overall security of the prison facility."

This matter was investigated by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General and FCI-Berlin's Office of the Special Investigative Supervisor. The case was prosecuted by Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew T. Hunter and Assistant U.S. Attorney Anna Z. Krasinski.

###