



— THE UNITED STATES —  
DEPARTMENT *of* JUSTICE

U.S. Attorney's Office  
Northern District of Texas

Leigha Simonton | United States Attorney

## **Sheriff's Deputies Allegedly Tipped Off DEA Target**

Two sheriff's deputies who allegedly tipped off a drug trafficker about an impending DEA raid are being federally prosecuted, announced U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Leigha Simonton.

Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office Deputy Kyle Linker, 33, was charged via criminal information and pleaded guilty Tuesday to one count of obstruction of justice.

His colleague, Paul Jessen, Jr., 34, was indicted Tuesday on one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice, two counts of obstruction of justice, and two counts of making false statements. He has not yet entered a plea.

"Local, state, and federal law enforcement must work in concert to keep our communities safe. When we find a uniformed officer has undermined another agency's investigation, we take swift action," said U.S. Attorney Leigha Simonton. "Law enforcement works best when we work as a team."

"It's deeply troubling when sworn Law Enforcement officers disclose information about upcoming operations to criminals," said Special Agent in Charge Raul Bujanda of the FBI Albuquerque Field Office. "It endangers the officers in the operation and jeopardizes the evidence they are seeking. The FBI will continue to provide all available resources towards identifying, investigating, and presenting for prosecution any individuals who betray their badges and their oaths of office."

"Every day, the men and women of the DEA work with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to bring drug dealers to justice," said Towanda Thorne-James, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA's El Paso Field Division. "Mr. Linker chose to partner with the drug dealers instead, and now he too will face the consequences."

According to Mr. Linker's plea papers, the two deputies met the drug trafficker during the execution of a state search warrant in Los Ranchos, New Mexico, in July 2021.

After finding methamphetamine inside his residence, they recruited him as a confidential informant.

In November 2021, a DEA agent notified Mr. Linker that the agency planned to conduct an operation near the drug trafficker's home. Fearing the operation might target the trafficker, Mr. Linker reached out to warn him about the impending operation. The drug trafficker canceled his upcoming transaction, and the DEA was unable to gather evidence against him.

Upon examining the drug trafficker's phone records, DEA agents began to suspect that he had been tipped off by Mr. Linker and decided to conduct another operation without notifying Mr. Linker first.

In December 2021, the DEA executed a search warrant at the drug trafficker's residence and located more than 470 grams of methamphetamine and a firearm.

During the ensuing interview, the drug trafficker admitted to the agents that he had been previously tipped off by Mr. Linker. The DEA devised a plan to confirm the trafficker's account.

Shortly thereafter, an agent contacted Mr. Linker to inform him the DEA was planning to use an informant to purchase methamphetamine from the drug trafficker. Although the agent specifically instructed Mr. Linker not to contact the trafficker, Mr. Linker messaged the trafficker to "call me ASAP."

Unbeknownst to Mr. Linker, the drug trafficker was still in the presence of law enforcement.

The drug trafficker called Mr. Linker, who told him he was "on DEA's radar" and instructed him to have someone else deliver drugs to the DEA informant.

Shortly after receiving word from the DEA that the operation would continue as planned, Mr. Linker texted Mr. Jessen to complain about the DEA's plan.

"Tell [trafficker] not to sell to anyone. And go to a hotel or stay with someone else for a bit," Mr. Jessen allegedly responded.

"What I should do is have you call [trafficker] that way when they ultimately say I tipped [trafficker] off I can show them my call logs and be like I haven't talked to him since this morning," Mr. Linker texted back.

"I'll [expletive] do it," Mr. Jessen allegedly responded.

"Perfect," Mr. Linker said. "Plausible deniability for me."

The pair then allegedly called the drug trafficker from Mr. Jessen's phone.

Mr. Linker told the drug trafficker the DEA would move forward with the operation and advised him to “shut everything down.” He then gave the trafficker excuses he could use to explain why he’d called off the transaction.

The drug trafficker was charged in a separate federal case. In June 2024, he pleaded guilty to possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine and is currently awaiting sentencing.

Mr. Linker now faces up to 20 years in federal prison. His sentencing date has not yet been set.

Mr. Jessen – who is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law – faces up to 70 years in federal prison if convicted of all counts.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Albuquerque Field Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Albuquerque District Office, and the Department of Justice – Office of Inspector General conducted the investigation with the cooperation of the Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Office. Northern District of Texas Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean Long is prosecuting the case in the District of New Mexico.

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