

PRESS RELEASE

Retired DEA agent going to prison for 5 years for conspiracy to defraud the United States and conspiracy to distribute controlled substances

Wednesday, January 21, 2026

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of New York

BUFFALO, N.Y. - U.S. Attorney Michael DiGiacomo announced today that retired Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agent Joseph Bongiovanni, 61, of Tonawanda, NY, who was convicted of one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, one count of conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance, four counts of obstruction of justice, and one count of false statement to law enforcement, was sentenced to serve 60 months in prison by U.S. District Judge Lawrence J. Vilardo.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joseph M. Tripi, Nicholas T Cooper, and Casey L. Chalbeck, who handled the prosecution of the case, stated that between 1998 and February 1, 2019, Bongiovanni served as a Special Agent with the Drug Enforcement Administration. From 2001 until his retirement, he was assigned to the Buffalo Resident Office. Bongiovanni used his position as a DEA special agent to defraud the DEA, an agency that is a part of the Department of Justice and the Executive Branch of the United States government, by violating his oath to the United States Constitution and duty to enforce the drug laws of the United States. As a part of his agreement to defraud the United States in violation of his oath and duty, and as part of his agreement to accept bribes, Bongiovanni protected his friends, associates, and individuals he believed were members or associates of Italian Organized Crime in Buffalo, from investigation, arrest, and prosecution. Bongiovanni provided Michael Masecchia, a former Buffalo School teacher with connections to Italian Organized Crime, and others involved in the distribution of substantial quantities of marijuana, cocaine, and fentanyl pills, by providing law enforcement sensitive information about the existence of investigations, the identities of informants, and about sensitive law enforcement techniques and tactics. As part of his protection and in furtherance of his conspiracy to defraud the DEA, Bongiovanni opened a case file within the DEA, which he then used to obtain to ensure that other state and local law enforcement agencies, and federal agents, would defer the investigation of the

individuals that the defendant was protecting to the defendant. Bongiovanni also used the DEA case file to enter information pertaining to drug traffickers he was protecting into deconfliction databases in order to alert himself if any other members of law enforcement were investigating coconspirators Bongiovanni was protecting.

Relatedly, Bongiovanni was convicted of obstruction of justice and making materially false statements to an agent of the United States for preparing false and fraudulent official DEA memoranda, and making false statements to agents investigating Bongiovanni, to conceal his relationship with Peter Gerace Jr., an individual who was under investigation by the DEA, and others for drug trafficking and related offenses.

"As a member of law enforcement, this defendant was in a position of trust in the eyes of the public," stated U.S. Attorney DiGiacomo. "However, his criminal actions over the course of 10-plus years eroded that public trust and tarnished the reputation of the men and women in law enforcement who uphold justice with honesty and integrity every day."

"Law enforcement officers are entrusted with significant authority and violating that trust will not be tolerated. Today's sentencing affirms that no one is above the law," said Philip Tejera, Special Agent-in-Charge of the FBI's Buffalo Field Office. "Bongiovanni's actions, however, do not represent the vast majority of law enforcement officers who protect their communities with integrity and honor. The FBI, and our law enforcement partners, remain committed to accountability and protecting the integrity of the criminal justice system."

"Bongiovanni flagrantly betrayed his oath, and the trust placed in him by the American people. Instead of upholding the law, he became the very criminal he was sworn to pursue," said Erin Keegan, HSI Buffalo Special-Agent-in Charge. "Bongiovanni thought he was above the law, but today's sentence proves otherwise. We are proud to work alongside our law enforcement partners to ensure those who abuse positions of power are held accountable."

"The Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General is committed to ensuring the integrity of the Department's law enforcement personnel by investigating alleged misconduct and supporting criminal prosecution when warranted by the evidence," stated OIG Special Agent-in-Charge Ryan Geach. "The jury's verdict in this case and today's sentencing affirm the OIG's mission."

"The sentencing today of retired DEA Special Agent Joseph Bongiovanni sends a powerful message that those who betray their badge will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law," stated DEA Northeast Associate Chief of Operations Frank

Tarentino. "Any abuse of authority is a breach of trust that not only undermines public confidence but also erodes the foundation of integrity upon which society relies."

Michael Masecchia was previously convicted and sentenced to serve seven years in prison. Peter Gerace Jr. was convicted by a federal jury and is awaiting sentencing.

The sentencing is the result of an investigation by Homeland Security Investigations, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Erin Keegan; the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Philip Tejera; and the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General New York Field Office Special Agent-in-Charge Ryan Geach. The Drug Enforcement Administration, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Frank A. Tarantino, III, New York Field Division, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Bryan DiGirolamo, New York Field Division, the Erie County Sheriff's Office, under the direction of Sheriff John Garcia, and the Niagara County Sheriff's Office, under the direction of Sheriff Michael Filicetti also assisted in the investigation.