

PRESS RELEASE

Federal Correctional Officer Convicted of Bribery, Smuggling, and Drug Conspiracy

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia

ATLANTA – Following a six-day trial, a federal jury convicted Patrick Shackelford, a former federal correctional officer, for accepting bribes and conspiring with inmates to smuggle narcotics and other contraband into the U.S. Penitentiary Atlanta ("USP-Atlanta") using an elaborate scheme through which visitors introduced contraband into the prison through a secret hole in the visitation area. Shackelford was immediately taken into federal custody upon entry of the jury's verdict on April 2.

"Instead of fulfilling his duty to safeguard a federal prison, Shackelford took bribes from inmates to facilitate their smuggling of large quantities of methamphetamine and other contraband for distribution to other inmates," said U.S. Attorney Theodore S. Hertzberg. "Shackelford betrayed his oath, chose to be a corrupt tool of the inmates in his charge, and potentially endangered the safety and security of his fellow officers and prisoners through his brazen conduct."

"Correctional facilities depend on the integrity of those entrusted to safeguard them," said Peter Ellis, Acting Special Agent in Charge of FBI Georgia. "By abusing his position to smuggle drugs and other contraband into USP-Atlanta, Shackelford undermined the safety and security of the institution, his fellow officers, and the inmates in their custody. The FBI remains committed to rooting out corruption at every level and holding accountable those who violate the public's trust."

"The Correctional Officer's acts compromised the safety and security of the federal prison. The Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General is committed to rooting out corruption and bringing perpetrators to justice," stated Eric Fehlman, Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General Southeast Region.

According to U.S. Attorney Hertzberg, the charges, and other information presented in court: From approximately June 2018 through February 2019, Shackelford conspired with federal inmates Patrick Kirkman, Mitchell Arms, James Hughes, and others to

smuggle prohibited items and narcotics, including methamphetamine and marijuana, into USP-Atlanta, a then medium-security federal prison.

Shackelford was a federal correctional officer and plumbing supervisor at USP-Atlanta who managed a crew of inmate plumbers, including Hughes. As part of the scheme, Shackelford informed Hughes about a hidden room and "voided area" that adjoined the prison visitation area. With Shackelford's assistance, Hughes and another inmate, under the guise of making plumbing repairs, used a sledgehammer and power drill to create large passageways into the hidden room and voided area. From that space, they created a small hole under a sink in the restroom of the visitation area. They then concealed the passageway with a metal plate. During weekend visitation, some of the inmates' associates brought tightly wrapped packages containing contraband to the prison and pushed them through the hole under the restroom sink into the "voided area." On a nearly weekly basis between June 2018 and February 2019, Hughes and another inmate retrieved the contraband from the voided area, using their plumbing cart and tools as cover to move the contraband across USP-Atlanta.

Shackelford further helped the inmates by allowing them to hide the contraband in the "plumbing shop," including in the ceiling of an empty staff office that was next to Shackelford's. For safety and security reasons, inmates were not supposed to have access to such offices. However, Shackelford unlocked the adjacent office for Hughes so often that it came to be known as "Jamie's office." Shackelford also helped escort his inmate co-conspirators through checkpoints to deliver contraband packages to the cellblocks.

In exchange for permitting inmates to smuggle and distribute contraband, Shackelford received \$5,000 and pain pills from Hughes, and Hughes and the inmate plumbing crew completed Shackelford's plumbing assignments for him.

Kirkman and Arms, both of whom were serving sentences for federal drug trafficking crimes, were among the inmates at USP-Atlanta who received the contraband, including narcotics, through the scheme. While the operation was ongoing, Kirkman paid Hughes nearly \$20,000 via Cash App to smuggle in the contraband and provided the cash for Shackelford's \$5,000 bribe. Hughes learned from Kirkman, Arms, and others when the packages had been smuggled through the visitor's bathroom.

In February 2019, prison officials discovered a batch of contraband hidden in the ceiling of the plumbing office. Specifically, officials found roughly two dozen packages containing over a pound of 100% pure methamphetamine, over a kilogram of marijuana, synthetic marijuana or "spice," tobacco, and several cell phones. This was one of the largest contraband recoveries in the history of USP-Atlanta.

Shackelford's inmate co-conspirators pleaded guilty in connection with this prison bribery and contraband smuggling scheme:

- Patrick Kirkman, 39, of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, pled guilty to federal bribery on February 11, 2026.
- Mitchell Arms, 45, of Columbia, Tennessee, pled guilty to possessing, obtaining, or attempting to obtain a prohibited object in federal prison, namely, methamphetamine, on June 18, 2024.
- James Hughes, 48, of Etowah, Tennessee, pled guilty to conspiracy to commit bribery and conspiracy to provide and possess prohibited objects in a federal prison, including methamphetamine, marijuana, and cellular phones, on October 7, 2023.

Sentencing for Patrick Shackelford, 51, of Senoia, Georgia, is scheduled for July 20, 2026, at 9:30 a.m. before U.S. District Judge William M. Ray, II. Shackelford faces a mandatory minimum of ten years of imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

This case is being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Alex R. Sistla and Garrett L. Bradford are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact the U.S. Attorney's Public Affairs Office at USAGAN.PressEmails@usdoj.gov or (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is <http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndga>.