

PRESS RELEASE

Pharaoh's owner going to prison for 25 years for bribery, sex trafficking conspiracy and witness tampering

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For Immediate Release

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

BUFFALO, N.Y. - U.S. Attorney Michael DiGiacomo announced today that Peter Gerace, 59, of Clarence, NY, was sentenced to serve 25 years in prison by U.S. District Judge Lawrence J. Vilaro after a jury convicted him of conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, drug trafficking and defrauding the United States, along with witness tampering, maintaining a drug involved premises and bribing a public official.

Between 2005, and 2019, Gerace, owned and operated Pharaoh's Gentlemen's Club. While doing so Gerace engaged in various criminal activity to include conspiring to distribute controlled substances, sex trafficking and bribing former Drug Enforcement Agent Joesph Bongiovanni. Gerace paid Bongiovanni in exchange for Bongiovanni using his position to dissuade other members of law enforcement from conducting investigations into Gerace's activities at Pharaoh's. Bongiovanni was previously convicted and was sentenced to serve five years in prison. Gerace also forced and coerced Pharaoh's dancers to engage in commercial sex acts.

"The conduct Peter Gerace engaged in had a horrendous impact on the victims and negatively impacted the community," stated U.S. Attorney DiGiacomo. "My office will continue pursue individuals who engage in such conduct and hold them accountable."

"Today's sentencing of Peter Gerace sends a clear message that individuals who exploit vulnerable people for profit will be held accountable," said Philip Tejera, Special Agent-in-Charge of the FBI Buffalo Field Office. "This case exposed the devastating impact of drug trafficking, public corruption, and human trafficking within Western New York. To those who have been exploited or trafficked: your life matters, and your voice matters. The FBI encourages victims and survivors to come forward, as we have dedicated professionals and resources available to provide support. Call 1-800-CALL-FBI or submit a tip online at tips.fbi.gov."

"Today's sentence closes a dark chapter in which this defendant treated people as commodities and tried to bend the justice system to his will," said HSI Buffalo Special Agent-in-Charge Erin Keegan. "No amount of money, influence, or intimidation could shield Peter Gerace from accountability. HSI Buffalo and our partners will continue to stand with victims, follow the evidence, and dismantle criminal networks that profit from exploitation in our community."

"Today's sentence sends a clear message to anybody who would seek to bribe a corrupt federal law enforcement agent to facilitate crimes like drug and sex trafficking," said Ryan T. Geach, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General Northeast Region. "The DOJ OIG commends its investigative partners and the U.S. Attorney's Office on this just outcome."

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joseph M. Tripi, Nicholas T. Cooper, and Casey L. Chalbeck. 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 U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, under the direction of Special-Agent-In-Charge Ryan T. Geach, Northeast Region.