

PRESS RELEASE

Bernalillo County Sheriff's Deputy Convicted of Tipping Off DEA Targets

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For Immediate Release

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

LUBBOCK, Texas – United States Attorney for the Northern District of Texas, Ryan Raybould, announced the July 10 conviction of a Bernalillo County, New Mexico Sheriff's Office detective for obstructing Drug Enforcement Administration investigations and making a false statement to the FBI.

After five days of trial and three hours of deliberation, a New Mexico jury convicted Paul Jessen, Jr., 36, of one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice, two counts of obstruction of justice, and one count of making a false statement.

Due to a recusal by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Mexico, Assistant U.S. Attorneys from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Texas prosecuted the case. The trial was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

“Paul Jessen, Jr. violated his oath, betrayed his position of public trust and jeopardized the safety of fellow law enforcement officers when he compromised DEA operations by providing confidential information to a known drug trafficker” said U.S. Attorney Ryan Raybould. “When given the opportunity to do the right thing, Jessen compounded his criminality by lying to the FBI and further obfuscating justice. Most law enforcement officers serve with honor and distinction, but those rare few like this former Bernalillo County Sheriff's Deputy who abuse their positions of trust will be held accountable by the Department of Justice. Credit to the agents who investigated and the Northern District of Texas AUSAs who prosecuted this very important public corruption case in New Mexico.”

"Jessen failed to conduct his work with honor and integrity when he used his law enforcement position to obstruct a DEA investigation and made a false statement in an attempt to avoid accountability," said Special Agent in Charge Cloey Pierce of the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General's (DOJ OIG) South Central Region. "The DOJ OIG, along with its law enforcement partners, is committed to rooting out this kind of wrongdoing and bringing perpetrators to justice."

"The integrity of the criminal justice system depends on law enforcement officers honoring their oath and protecting the sensitive information entrusted to them. By tipping off the subject of an active investigation, Jessen not only compromised investigative efforts but also put fellow law enforcement personnel in unnecessary risk and betrayed the public's confidence," said Justin A. Garris, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Albuquerque Field Office. "We remain steadfast in our commitment to working with our partners to protect the integrity of our investigations and ensure that anyone who violates the public's trust is held accountable."

According to evidence presented at trial, Paul Jessen, Jr. and former BCSO Detective Kyle Linker recruited a drug trafficker to work as a confidential informant in July 2021. In November 2021, a DEA agent notified Linker that the agency planned to conduct an operation near the confidential informant's home. Fearing the operation might target the BCSO confidential informant, Linker reached out to warn him about the impending operation. As a result, the confidential informant changed the location of a drug deal and canceled another deal altogether.

At trial, prosecutors introduced text messages between Linker and Jessen. The text messages showed that the two BCSO detectives harbored personal animus against the DEA in Albuquerque because they believed the DEA was stealing their targets. In one message, Linker wrote: "I should tell [confidential informant] to tip off [drug trafficker] hahahaha." Jessen replied, "Do it!" Also, in response to learning about a DEA operation, Jessen wrote: "It would be a shame if there is nothing there." Linker responded, "Gonna be a real shame."

In early December 2021, Jessen received information about an upcoming DEA operation. Jessen sent a text saying: "It's happening this upcoming week." Two minutes later, Linker sent the confidential informant a text warning, "Fairly certain [drug trafficker] getting hit Mon or Wed next week. Got a tip."

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

According to additional evidence admitted during trial, in December 2021, the DEA executed a search warrant at the confidential informant's residence and located more than 470 grams of methamphetamine, fentanyl pills, and a firearm. During the ensuing interview, the confidential informant admitted to the agents that he had been previously tipped off by Linker. The DEA devised a plan to confirm the confidential informant's statement.

Shortly thereafter, an agent contacted Linker to inform him the DEA was planning to conduct a controlled purchase from the confidential informant. Although the agent specifically instructed Linker not to contact the informant, Linker messaged the informant to "call me ASAP." Unbeknownst to Linker, the confidential informant was still in the presence of law enforcement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prosecutors introduced evidence that Linker used Jessen's cell phone to contact the confidential informant to further warn that the DEA was planning to target the confidential informant.

The jury also saw evidence of a meeting between Jessen and the confidential informant. Jessen searched the confidential informant to see if he was wearing a wire and said: "If I find out that you're like working for the DEA and you're gonna try and rat me out, like I'm not gonna answer your phone calls or anything."

Jessen was interviewed by an FBI special agent in January 2022. The jury found that Jessen made a false statement during the interview when he denied personal knowledge of anything inappropriate between Linker and the confidential informant.

Jessen faces up to 65 years in federal prison. His sentencing date has not been set but will be scheduled before Senior U.S. District Judge James O. Browning, from the District of New Mexico, Albuquerque Division, who presided over the trial.

Linker pled guilty to obstruction of justice and was sentenced to eight months' custody, resulting in a 30-day imprisonment term, followed by seven months of location monitoring.

The Department of Justice Office of Inspector General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Albuquerque Field Office, and the Drug Enforcement Administration's Albuquerque District Office conducted the investigation. Northern District of Texas Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sean Long and Ryan Redd prosecuted the case in the District of New Mexico.

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