



OFFICE OF THE **DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

P. DAVID SOARES

6 LODGE STREET

ALBANY, NEW YORK 12207

(518) 487-5460

(518) 487-5093 FAX

CONTACT: CECILIA WALSH (518) 275-4710

CECILIA.WALSH@ALBANYCOUNTYNY.GOV

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Guilty Verdict in Major Drug Trafficking Case



MANUEL LUNA

ALBANY, NY - District Attorney P. David Soares announced today that **MANUEL LUNA**, 51, of Queens, was found guilty after a jury trial of (1) Count of Operating as a Major Trafficker, a Class A-I Felony, (1) Count of Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the First Degree, a Class A-I Felony, and (1) Count of Conspiracy in the Second Degree, a Class B Felony, before the Honorable Richard Mott Albany County Court this afternoon.

LUNA faces up to Life in State Prison when sentenced on November 18, 2016.

“Not one person is immune from the harsh realities of the heroin epidemic that plagues our nation. When traffickers choose to use Albany County as a cut-through to supply poison to communities, they will be held to the highest level of the law.”

DEA Special Agent in Charge James Hunt stated, “This verdict sends a message to traffickers that law enforcement will not relent in our pursuit to bring them to justice. This organization’s circuitous drug smuggling route from Mexico to Florida to New York was used to evade police. However, evident in today’s guilty verdict, Manuel Luna along with his co-conspirators were not able to dodge DEA and our law enforcement partners’ investigative efforts.” SAC Hunt commends the Albany County District Attorney’s Office on their prosecutorial efforts.

According to the trial evidence, including testimony of over 40 witnesses, and documents filed in the case:

An anonymous tip to law enforcement in July 2013 led to a traffic stop of a vehicle that was travelling northbound on the NYS Thruway in the Town of Bethlehem. A secret compartment “trap” inside of the vehicle contained approximately 1 kilogram of heroin laced with fentanyl packaged in a “brick.” As a result of this traffic stop, a long-term investigation began into uncovering a multi-jurisdiction narcotics trafficking operation spanning from the supplier in Mexico, to West Palm Beach, Florida, up through New York City in the boroughs of the Bronx and Brooklyn, up the NYS Thruway through Albany County, and ultimately ending in Buffalo, NY for sale and distribution of the drugs. The investigation was led by the Drug Enforcement Administration, and uncovered eight co-defendants that were ultimately charged in this multi-million dollar narcotics distribution ring.

Between April and JULY of 2013, MANUEL LUNA operated as a major drug trafficker by knowingly possessing very large quantities of uncut cocaine and heroin in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and the Town of Bethlehem, with the intent to sell them. The trafficked narcotics were valued at several million dollars. In addition, LUNA did conspire with co-defendants to possess, sell, and profit from large quantities of heroin and cocaine through this pipeline, including participating in a scheme to drive stolen cars that contained secret compartment “traps” or gas tanks full of narcotics and US Currency in the furtherance of the scheme.

Co-Defendants include:

JOSE BELTRAN, 37, of Bronx, NY, who previously pleaded guilty to (1) Count of Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the First Degree, a Class A-I Felony, will be sentenced to up to 20 years in State Prison at a later date.

GERALDO TORRES, 44, of Buffalo, IGOR GUERRERO, 41, of New York, NY, MAYOBANEX RODRIGUEZ, 43, of West Palm Beach, FL, EMMANUEL MATEO, 37, of Bronx, NY, and EDWIN RIVERA, 30, of Buffalo, each separately pleaded guilty to (1) Count of Conspiracy in the Second Degree, a Class B Felony, and face up to 8 1/3 to 25 years in State

Prison when sentenced at a later date.

DA Soares acknowledges the outstanding efforts of multiple law enforcement agencies for their cooperation and assistance in the investigation and prosecution of this trafficking ring. The Drug Enforcement Administration, specifically the DEA New York Division, DEA Buffalo Residence Office, and DEA West Palm Beach District Office, all deserve recognition and appreciation for their efforts leading this case. He also thanked cooperating law enforcement agencies from Florida, including the West Palm Beach Police Department, the Palm Beach Sherriff's Office, and the Jupiter Police Department. DA Soares also acknowledges the contribution of New York law enforcement agencies that assisted on the case, including Bronx County District Attorney's Office Detective Investigators, Amtrak Police Department, Port Authority Police Department, the New York City Police Department, the New York State Police Department, the Albany County Sherriff's Office, the City of Buffalo Police Department, and the Chautauqua Police Department.

DA Soares also cites and recognizes Drug Enforcement Administration New York Group D-35 for their unparalleled dedication to the investigation and prosecution of this case.

Assistant District Attorney Jasper Mills and Assistant District Attorney Megan Spillane of the Street Crimes Unit prosecuted this case.

For more information please contact Cecilia Walsh (518) 275-4710 or cecilia.walsh@albanycountyny.gov

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