



**Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York**  
Bridget G. Brennan, Special Narcotics Prosecutor

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## **Six Charged as Round-the-Clock Street Market for Drugs is Dismantled in Upper Manhattan and the Bronx**

### *NYPD Received Dozens of Community Complaints about Disruptive Drug Activity during COVID-19 Pandemic*

Six individuals were arrested and indicted in connection with a disruptive street-level drug organization that operated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in Washington Heights, Manhattan and Kingsbridge Heights, Bronx. The organization allegedly sold a wide range of substances, including heroin mixed with fentanyl, counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamine, during the wiretap investigation conducted by the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor and the New York Police Department's (NYPD) Narcotics Borough Bronx, Narcotics Borough Manhattan North and 33<sup>rd</sup> Precinct.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan and New York City Police Commissioner Dermot F. Shea announced the arrests and a 55-count indictment charging members of the organization with top narcotics sales, possession and conspiracy. Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr. reviewed and submitted multiple eavesdropping applications for court authorization.

Five defendants were arrested this morning and a sixth was already in custody. All are scheduled for arraignment before Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Abraham Clott this afternoon.

Members of the highly organized street level group sold drugs to undercover NYPD officers on approximately 24 occasions. At the outset of the investigation, which began in January of 2020, sales to undercover officers occurred at West Kingsbridge Road and Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. The focus of the investigation subsequently shifted to the organization's main location on a block of Audubon Avenue between West 173<sup>rd</sup> and West 174<sup>th</sup> Streets in Washington Heights.

During the investigation, dozens of community members complained to the NYPD's 33<sup>rd</sup> Precinct about the open and notorious drug activity that took place in their neighborhood 24 hours per day.

YASHUA TORRES, the alleged ringleader, oversaw numerous workers and assigned different roles and shifts, covering mornings, afternoons and nights. In conducting sales, the alleged workers retrieved narcotics stashed in cars parked on the block and in nearby apartments. The investigation revealed that customers travelled to the Audubon Avenue block to purchase narcotics from as far away as Connecticut.

YASHUA TORRES allegedly travelled to Maine to sell to dealers there, where drugs could be resold for double the price.

A regular presence on the Audubon Avenue block , YASHUA TORRES interacted with local residents between alleged drug sales. At least one sale to an undercover officer took place at a pool that YASHUA TORRES set up for use by members of the community on the block in the summer of 2020. During the sale on July 21, 2020, YASHUA TORRES appeared on video with another individual selling twist of cocaine (approximately 19 grams) and 90 capsules of crack cocaine in exchange for \$1,450 cash.

The investigation revealed that members of the organization were security conscious, yet brazen. They allegedly coordinated by phone, and sometimes even by handheld two-way radio, using cryptic language to disguise their activity from law enforcement. Conscious of police activity in the area, they could be heard calling out the presence of police in the area as they continued conducting drug sales.

This morning, police arrested YASHUA TORRES and YASMIN BELTRAN at 600 West 176<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 45, and recovered a wrapped kilogram-sized package of suspected narcotics and over \$115,000 cash in a hallway closet. They also seized hundreds of pills and multiple pounds of marijuana.

Additional quantities of cocaine, heroin and pills, as well as thousands of dollars in cash, were recovered from 171 Audubon Avenue, Apt. 1, where RAIMONDIA HANDLEY was arrested.

NYPD Laboratory analysis determined that heroin sold to undercover officers was mixed with the potent synthetic opioid fentanyl. Purported prescription pills sold to undercover officers also proved to be counterfeits containing fentanyl. Members of the organization also sold cocaine, crack cocaine and methamphetamine.

Fentanyl is largely responsible for surging rates of overdose deaths across New York City, particularly in Upper Manhattan and the Bronx. Overdose deaths increased by 26% in the first half of 2020, according to the most recent publicly available data from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan thanked Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. and Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark and commended her office's Trial Division and the NYPD's Narcotics Borough Bronx, Narcotics Borough Manhattan North and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Precinct for their work on the investigation.

"I hope the arrests bring peace of mind to a neighborhood besieged with rampant sales of deadly drugs in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerns about personal health were aggravated by exposure to an unrelenting stream of foot traffic associated with the 24 hour a day drug bazaar operating on Audubon Avenue," said Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan, "I thank our law enforcement partners for their close collaboration, and the community for its patience, as we built a case against high-level members of this organization."

"These arrests end a brazen, illegal narcotics operation that, as alleged in the indictment filed by the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, victimized residents in two boroughs. I commend the sustained investigative work of our NYPD detectives and law enforcement partners for making sure that the defendants in this case would be brought to justice," said Police Commissioner Dermot Shea.

<b>Defendants</b>	<b>Charges</b>
Yashua Torres, aka "Jiggy" New York, NY Age: 34	Conspiracy 2 <sup>nd</sup> – 1 ct Conspiracy 4 <sup>th</sup> – 1 ct CSCS 1 <sup>st</sup> – 1 ct CSCS 2 <sup>nd</sup> – 9 cts CSCS 3 <sup>rd</sup> – 22 cts
Yasmin Beltran New York, NY	Conspiracy 4 <sup>th</sup> – 1 ct CSCS 3 <sup>rd</sup> – 1 ct

Age: 30	
Kristian Ares Torres	Conspiracy 2nd – 1 ct
Age: 28	Conspiracy 4th – 1 ct
	CSCS 1st – 1 ct
	CSCS 2nd – 2 cts
Raimondia Handley	Conspiracy 2nd – 1 ct
New York, NY	Conspiracy 4th – 1 ct
Age: 20	CSCS 2nd – 1 ct
	CSCS 3rd – 1 ct
Vicente Paulino	Conspiracy 4th – 1 ct
New York, NY	CPCS 3rd – 3 cts
Age: 29	CPCS 4th – 1 ct
	CPCS 5th – 1 ct
Jason Elvir	Conspiracy 4th – 1 ct
Brooklyn, NY	CPCS 3rd – 3 cts
Age: 36	CPCS 4th – 1 ct
	CPCS 5th – 2 cts

The charges and allegations are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.