



***Drug Enforcement Administration***  
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Date: September 28, 2023

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## ***NEWS RELEASE***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **Over 40 Pounds of Fentanyl Seized from Drug Mill Six Blocks Away from Bronx Daycare**

*Defendant Transported Fentanyl in Rolling Suitcase on Subway*

**NEW YORK CITY** – As part of an ongoing investigation into fentanyl trafficking in New York City, federal, state and local law enforcement officers recovered over 40 pounds of suspected fentanyl, carrying an estimated street value of \$1.5 million, in the Bronx on Tuesday evening. This seizure occurred six blocks away from DaNino Nino Day Care, where a one-year old child died after fentanyl exposure and three other children taken to the hospital.

Frank A. Tarentino III, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) New York Division (NY), Bridget G. Brennan, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, Edward A. Caban the Commissioner of the New York City Police Department (NYPD), New York State Police Acting Superintendent Steven A. Nigrelli, and Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark announced the arrest of Juan Gabriel HERRERA VARGAS following an investigation by DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force (NYDETF), Group T-21 and New York City Office of the Special Narcotic Prosecutor. The NYDETF comprises agents and officers of the DEA, NYPD, and the NYSP.

A criminal complaint filed by the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor (SNP) charges HERRERA VARGAS with Operating as a Major Trafficker, Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the First and Third Degrees, and Criminally Using Drug Paraphernalia in the Second

Degree. HERRERA VARGAS was arrested on Tuesday, September 26, 2023, and is awaiting arraignment today in Manhattan Criminal Court.

**DEA Special Agent in Charge Frank Tarentino** said, “The public outcry after the poisoning death of a toddler was not enough to stop a drug mill from operating just six blocks away from that Daycare. Trafficking organizations use these toxic mills to prepare and package bulk drugs into street-ready glassines for distribution for one reason- profit. Mills lurk throughout our city in apartments, basements or even under floorboards and that is why DEA and our law enforcement partners don’t stop working. Herrera Vargas took danger one step further and wheeled over 40 pounds of fentanyl around the city and on the subway with no regard to public safety. I applaud the members of the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, Office of Special Narcotic Prosecutor, and Bronx District Attorney’s Office for their diligent work.”

**Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan** said, “The conduct charged is shockingly brazen, especially in a city still grieving the overdose death of a young child who lost his life at a nearby daycare center. The defendant is charged with transporting almost 30 pounds of fentanyl bricks in a rolling suitcase on a subway, through a subway station, and on the sidewalks of a busy Bronx neighborhood. We will continue to work tirelessly with all of our law enforcement partners to protect our city from the scourge of deadly fentanyl. I commend members of the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force and my office’s Investigators Unit and Special Investigations Bureau for their work on this case.”

**Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark** said, “Once again, a large supply of fentanyl has been found in the Bronx. For years, our community has been a hub for fentanyl distribution and has suffered so many deaths. The catastrophic loss of one-year-old Nicholas Dominici is the bleakest reminder that we must be relentless in removing drug traffickers from our city. I am grateful to my federal and state partners for their dedication and diligence in our fight to save lives.”

**NYPD Commissioner Edward A. Caban** said, “The NYPD and our colleagues on the NYDETF are confronting head-on a terrifying, ever-growing threat that has never been more lethal. We are fighting this deadly epidemic with urgency and determination. And, along with our partners at the office of the Bronx District Attorney and the New York City Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, we vow to continue battling against the manufacture and use of this cheap, synthetic opioid, including by disrupting the supply chains that traffic it into New York City neighborhoods.”

**New York State Police Acting Superintendent Steven A. Nigrelli** said, “I commend the diligent work of our New York State Police members, and thank the DEA, NYPD, and New York City Office of the Special Narcotic Prosecutor for their partnership in this case and working to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities. The arrest of this individual is a testament to our commitment to stop these illegal and dangerous drugs from infiltrating our neighborhoods. The State Police will continue to work with all our law enforcement partners to keep criminals like this and these deadly drugs off our streets.”

On September 26, 2023, agents and officers from DEA, NYPD, NYSP and the New York City Office of the Special Narcotic Prosecutor conducted surveillance on Heath Avenue in the Bronx. At approximately 4:40 p.m., Juan Gabriel HERRERA VARGAS was observed carrying a small black bag to the Kingsbridge Road subway station. Through physical and electronic surveillance, agents and officers tracked HERRERA VARGAS as he travelled south and later made a northbound return trip on the subway.

At approximately 6:00 p.m., HERRERA VARGAS was seen exiting the Kingsbridge Road station and walking towards an apartment building at 2800 Heath Ave., Bronx, NY pulling a black and tan rolling suitcase. Agents and officers approached and identified themselves to HERRERA VARGAS at approximately 6:15 p.m. HERRERA VARGAS handed agents his wallet and identification and ran away, eluding law enforcement, and leaving the rolling suitcase behind. Agents and officers observed 13 rectangular shaped kilogram bricks of suspected fentanyl in the black and tan rolling suitcase.

Agents and officers seized the 13 kilograms of suspected fentanyl and maintained surveillance on 2800 Heath Ave., Bronx, NY. At approximately 8:40 p.m. HERRERA VARGAS was observed exiting 2800 Heath Ave., Apt. 1J, Bronx, NY pulling a blue rolling suitcase with a red stripe in the middle. Agents and officers arrested HERRERA VARGAS and seized approximately 50,000 glassines wrapped together into 25 larger packages from inside the suitcase.

At approximately 11:00 p.m., agents and officers conducted a search of 2800 Heath Ave., Apt. 1J, Bronx, NY where one kilogram of suspected fentanyl, six pounds of loose powder, 10,000 filled glassines and materials used for packaging glassines such as grinders, scales, glassines, stamps and rubber bands were recovered. The fentanyl and packaging materials were found in the back bedroom which also contained a glass table set up for packaging narcotics and bright lights. The second bedroom contained additional paraphernalia along with a large TV monitor that was connected to a security camera to monitor the apartment. The apartment windows were taped up with large black plastic trash bags to ensure nothing was visible from the outside.

The results of DEA laboratory analysis on the narcotics seized are pending.

This case is another example of how fentanyl is being packaged into street-ready units for mass distribution to the New York City and Northeast areas. According to the DEA, fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is approximately 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. It is inexpensive, widely available, highly addictive, and comes in a variety of colors, shapes and forms – including powder and pills. Drug traffickers are increasingly mixing fentanyl with other illicit drugs to drive addiction and create repeat business. Many victims of fentanyl poisoning were unaware they ingested fentanyl.

According to the CDC, an estimated 110,684 people in the United States died of drug overdoses and poisonings in 2022, with almost 70 percent of those deaths involving synthetic opioids like fentanyl. Meanwhile, 3,026 people fatally overdosed in New York City alone in 2022, according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Only two milligrams of fentanyl is considered a potentially lethal dose.

The DEA will be hosting the second annual Family Summit on Fentanyl Poisoning Epidemic on Tuesday, October 3 at John Jay College in Manhattan at 5:30 p.m. Media is welcome to attend.

<b>Defendant</b>	<b>Charges</b>
Juan Gabriel HERRERA VARGAS New York, NY Age: 42	Operating as a Major Trafficer 1 ct CPCS 1 <sup>st</sup> – 3 cts CPCS 3 <sup>rd</sup> – 3 cts Criminally Using Drug Paraphernalia 2 <sup>nd</sup> – 2 cts

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