



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

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Contacts:

Special Narcotics Prosecutor's Office
Kati Cornell
(212) 815-0525

DEA New York Division
Erin Mulvey
(212) 337-2906

Thirty-Eight Pounds of Methamphetamine and Cocaine Recovered in Hell's Kitchen Luxury Building

An investigation into methamphetamine and cocaine trafficking in New York City resulted in the seizure of approximately 30 pounds of methamphetamine, plus four kilograms (over eight pounds) of cocaine from an apartment at 550 West 54th Street, a luxury residential building in Hell's Kitchen. Two men face charges of Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the First, Second and Third Degrees. The estimated street value of the drugs seized is over \$1.1 million.

Bridget G. Brennan, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, Frank A. Tarentino III, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) New York Division (NY), New York City Police Commissioner Edward A. Caban and New York State Police Acting Superintendent Steven G. James announced the arrests following arraignments in Manhattan Criminal Court.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget Brennan said, "Like deadly fentanyl, methamphetamine is a highly addictive synthetic drug damaging lives in our city and across the country. Cocaine seizures in our city are also surging. I thank our law enforcement partners in the DEA, NYPD and New York State Police for their collaboration and commitment to reining in the supply of deadly drugs."

DEA Special Agent in Charge Frank Tarentino said, "Our investigations take us all over New York City and the world, but this investigation led us to a million-dollar cocaine seizure in Hell's Kitchen. DEA and our law enforcement partners are steadfast in bringing to justice those responsible for pushing illegal drugs onto our streets. I commend the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force and the New York City Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for their hard work on this investigation."

NYPD Commissioner Edward A. Caban said, "The charges stemming from this case demonstrate the unwavering commitment of the NYPD, the DEA, and all of our law enforcement partners to investigate thoroughly anyone allegedly involved in the illicit drug trade in New York City. These arrests send a clear message that we will continue to be relentless in seizing poisonous substances before they are distributed throughout our neighborhoods."

New York State Police Acting Superintendent Steven G. James said, "These individuals had no regard for the dangers they, or this operation, brought to this community. Today's charges are a result of an aggressive strategy to stop illegal drug operations and keep deadly substances off our streets. We remain committed to working with our law enforcement partners to continue to intercept this type of illegal activity and the damage it does to our communities."

On March 12, 2024, members of the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force (NYDETF), Group T-43, were conducting surveillance at 550 West 54th Street in preparation for a court-authorized search of Apartment 27F, when they observed Jovanny SALAS allegedly leave the apartment at approximately 5:47 p.m. SALAS entered an elevator on the 27th floor and arrived in the building's lobby moments later. Agents and officers apprehended SALAS in the lobby and recovered a wallet bearing identifications belonging to Sergio BETANCOURT PERALTA. The wallet had a key attached to it, which allegedly opened the door to Apartment 27F.

At approximately 5:55 p.m. that evening, members of NYDETF Group T-43 entered Apartment 27F to conduct a court-authorized search and encountered BETANCOURT PERALTA inside the apartment. Agents and officers took him into custody.

During the search, agents and officers recovered approximately 30 pounds of methamphetamine and over eight pounds of cocaine packed in a suitcase inside a bedroom closet. Approximately \$27,880 cash was found in a backpack in the closet. Also seized were BETANCOURT PERALTA's Mexican passport and expired U.S. visa/border-crossing card, and SALAS' Mexican voter registration, Colorado driver's license and U.S. passport.

SALAS and BETANCOURT PERALTA were arraigned in Manhattan Criminal Court the night of Wednesday, March 13, 2024.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget Brennan thanked Manhattan District Alvin L. Bragg, Jr., and commended SNP's Special Investigations Bureau, DEA New York Division, the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, the New York City Police Department, and the New York State Police for their work on the investigation.

Defendants	Charges
Jovanny Salas	CPCS 1 st – 1 ct
Denver, CO	CPCS 2 nd – 1 ct
Age: 29	CPCS 3 rd – 2 cts
Sergio Betancourt Peralta	CPCS 1 st – 1 ct
New York, NY	CPCS 2 nd – 1 ct
Age: 34	CPCS 3 rd – 2 cts

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