



Orange County News

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District Attorney Hoovler Announces Ten Year Sentence In Cocaine Distribution Conspiracy Case

“Operation Chopper” Defendant Brandon Masker Sentenced to Ten Years

Forfeits \$30,000 in Crime Proceeds and Three ATVs

Orange County District Attorney David M. Hoovler announced on Wednesday April 19, 2017, Brandon Masker, 34, of Warwick, one of the defendants charged in the “Operation Chopper” narcotics enforcement action, was sentenced by Orange County Court Judge Robert H. Freehill to ten years in state prison.

On June 23, 2016, Masker had pleaded guilty to the Class A felony of Operating as a Major Trafficker. During his plea Masker admitted that was the director of a controlled substance organization that distributed cocaine throughout Orange County and surrounding areas, and that he had at least four people working under him, who distributed the cocaine for him throughout Orange County. Masker’s organization was centered in the Town of Warwick. As part of the plea agreement Masker forfeited \$30,000 in drug proceeds, as well as three all-terrain vehicles which were used to transport narcotics. One ATV was worth over \$12,000.

The “Operation Chopper” investigation also revealed narcotics crimes committed by various individuals as well as by “outlaw motorcycle clubs”. In addition to the criminal prosecutions the District Attorney’s Office instituted civil forfeiture proceedings and to date has recovered \$113,500 in narcotic trafficking proceeds from “Operation Chopper” defendants.

District Attorney Hoovler thanked the New York State Police Special Investigations Unit and the Sussex County, New Jersey, Prosecutor’s Office for their efforts in this investigation. District

Attorney Hoovler highly commended the New York State Police for their investigation given the complexity of the case.

Assistant District Attorney Kerry Kolek assisted in the investigation of the case and is prosecuting all of the defendants charged in the operation.

During the sentencing proceedings Masker's attorney asked that he be sentenced to less than ten years in prison citing an incident where Masker had helped apprehend a purse snatcher in a convenience store. Prosecutors opposed that application.

Brandon Masker's plea marked the first time that there had been a plea to Operating as a Major Trafficker in Orange County, and the first time the Orange County District Attorney's office has charged someone with that crime. The crime which passed by the New York State in 2009 is referred to as the "Drug Kingpin Statute" and is reserved for high level drug dealers. One of the elements of the crime is that the offender possess over \$75,000 worth of narcotics with intent to sell them in a one year time period.

"Hopefully the decade that this defendant will serve in state prison will deter others tempted to engage in narcotics dealing for profit," said District Attorney Hoovler. "It is only through enforcement actions such as "Operation Chopper" that law enforcement is able to pursue those higher level drug dealers and craftier offenders who attempt to insulate themselves from criminal liability by dealing drugs through intermediaries. Although we have emphasized education and treatment as important avenues to keep people off drugs in the first place, so that we may dry up the demand for illegal narcotics, we have also made it a priority to attack the supply of narcotics by vigorous enforcement actions against narcotics dealers. While it may be laudable that the defendant attempted to stop a purse snatcher while he was awaiting sentence, that does not change the fact that he had been operating as a major narcotics trafficker for years. There have been eighteen suspected, and fifteen confirmed, opioid overdose deaths in Orange County this year. This kind of carnage simply cannot be tolerated. My office will continue to use every tool at our disposal, including the use of wiretaps, civil forfeiture actions, and utilizing criminal statutes which have never been charged before in Orange County, to combat the illicit narcotics trade."



Brandon Masker

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