



Walton County Sheriff's Office
Michael A. Adkinson, Jr.
Office of the Sheriff
Walton County, Florida

U. S. Department of Justice
Lawrence Keefe
United States Attorney
Northern District of Florida



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For more information, contact:
Walton County Sheriff's Office
Corey Dobridnia
(850) 951-4759 - Office
(850) 855-0299 - Cell
cdobridnia@waltonso.org

For more information, contact:
U.S. Attorney's Office
Northern District of Florida
(850) 216-3829
USAFLN.Press.Office@usdoj.gov

**44 CHARGED FOLLOWING 18 MONTH INVESTIGATION INTO DRUG
TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION**

15 FACE FEDERAL CHARGES, 29 FACE STATE CHARGES

SANTA ROSA BEACH, FLORIDA – A total of 15 defendants have been indicted on federal drug-trafficking charges and an additional 29 co-conspirators face state drug-trafficking charges as a result of a multi-agency effort to bring down an organized drug trafficking operation in North Florida. Lawrence Keefe, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida, Walton County Sheriff Michael A. Adkinson, Jr., and Mike Dubet, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Jacksonville District Office, made the announcement at a press conference yesterday in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida.

In May 2019, the Walton County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Unit and the DEA Panama City Resident Office Task Force began investigating James Young and Shelley Johnson, a couple operating a methamphetamine, heroin, and fentanyl Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO) in Walton County, Florida.

Intelligence obtained during the investigation revealed Young routinely acquired multi-pound quantities of crystal methamphetamine and multi-ounce quantities of heroin and fentanyl from sources in the Atlanta, Georgia area. Young and Johnson distributed these controlled substances to other drug dealers and users in and around Walton County, Florida using Johnson's waterfront residence in Freeport, Florida.

A variety of investigative techniques were utilized by investigators to identify the full scope of Johnson and Young's activities. These techniques included extensive physical surveillance, numerous purchases totaling more than 500 grams methamphetamine by a DEA undercover agent, and four federal wire intercepts of telephones used by Johnson, Young, and one of Johnson's local sources of supply for heroin, methamphetamine and diverted pharmaceutical pills.

On May 6, 2020, the wire intercepts lead investigators to information that Young and Johnson were returning to the Walton County area from Atlanta with a shipment of methamphetamine.

The DEA and WCSO coordinated a traffic stop of Young and Johnson shortly after they returned to Walton County, Florida. A search of the vehicle resulted in the discovery of \$25,049.00 in U.S. Currency, approximately three pounds of crystal methamphetamine, and over 500 grams of suspected GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate). Following this traffic stop, WCSO and DEA Task Force investigators executed search warrants at three different locations associated with Young, Johnson, and one of their DTO distributors, where more evidence of drug trafficking was discovered and seized, along with four firearms.

In June and October of 2020, a federal grand jury at the U.S. District Court in Pensacola, Florida, returned indictments charging Johnson, Young, and 13 co-conspirators with conspiracy to possess controlled substances with the intent to distribute. Johnson and Young were also charged with possessing firearms as convicted felons. A copy of the indictment with more information about the federal defendants and the charges against them can be found at the bottom of this page.

State drug charges have been obtained in the 1st Judicial Circuit of Florida in Walton County against 29 additional individuals in this investigation.

To date, this investigation and other accompanying investigations have resulted in the seizure of the following:

- Nearly 20 pounds of crystal methamphetamine
- 672 grams of heroin
- 162 grams of carfentanil
- 32 grams of suspected fentanyl
- 533 grams of suspected GHB
- 5 motor vehicles valued at approximately \$91,515.00
- Freeport waterfront property valued at \$1.3 million
- \$27,572.00 U.S. Currency
- Four firearms

The indictment and arrests resulted from an extensive investigation by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), a joint federal, state, and local cooperative. The OCDETF approach to combating drug trafficking is the nation's primary tool for disrupting and dismantling major drug trafficking organizations, targeting national and regional level drug trafficking organizations, and coordinating the necessary law enforcement entities and resources to disrupt and dismantle the targeted criminal organization and seize its assets.

These cases resulted from investigations by the Walton County Sheriff's Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Department of Homeland Security Investigations, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives, the U.S. Marshal Service, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Bay County Sheriff's Office, the Panama City Beach Police Department, the Panama City Police Department, the Springfield Police Department, the Lynn Haven Police Department, the Washington County Sheriff's Office, the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, and the DeFuniak Springs Police Department. The federal cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Aine Ahmed.

An indictment is merely an allegation by a grand jury that a defendant has committed a violation of federal criminal law and is not evidence of guilt. All defendants are presumed innocent and

entitled to a fair trial, during which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida is one of 94 offices that serve as the nation's principal litigators under the direction of the Attorney General. To access available public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](#) website. For more information about the United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

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