



U. S. Department of Justice

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PANAMA CITY MAN SENTENCED TO 35 YEARS IN PRISON **FOR FIREARM AND DRUG RELATED OFFENSES**

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA – Jesus Lopez-Garza 37, of Panama City, Florida, was sentenced to 35 years imprisonment for possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine and marijuana, possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug-trafficking offense, being an alien in the United States after a prior removal, and possession of a firearm and ammunition by a convicted felon and illegal alien. Jason R. Coody, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida, announced the sentence.

“Drugs and a weapon in the hands of a convicted felon is a threatening and potentially deadly combination,” stated U.S. Attorney Coody. “The United States Attorney’s Office and our federal and local law enforcement partners are dedicated to making sure such criminals are punished appropriately.”

“Convicted felons and individuals illegally in the United States in possession of firearms in ammunition is illegal. When these prohibited individuals possess and use firearms in furtherance of their drug trafficking activities, it poses a serious threat to the safety of our communities,” said ATF Special Agent in Charge Craig W. Saier. “This sentencing in another example that working jointly with our local, state and federal law enforcement partners makes our streets safer.”

In April of 2021, Lopez-Garza came to the attention of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) as an individual involved in armed narcotics trafficking. Law enforcement determined that Lopez-Garza was at a hotel in Panama City. Search warrants were obtained and executed by the Regional Area Gang Enforcement Taskforce, which is staffed by ATF Special Agents and investigators from the Bay County Sheriff’s Office. Law enforcement ultimately discovered 10.7 pounds of methamphetamine, 12.4 pounds of marijuana, a quarter kilogram of para-fluorofentanyl, more than thirty thousand dollars in cash, a firearm, and ammunition. Homeland Security Investigations and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement determined that Lopez-Garza is a citizen of Mexico with no lawful immigration status in the United States.

“This criminal, who had previously been removed from the United States, thought he could again thwart our nation’s laws by illegally possessing a firearm and deadly narcotics,” said HSI Jacksonville Assistant Special Agent in Charge K. Jim Phillips. “Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) is proud to support our partners with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and the Bay County Sheriff’s Office during this investigation, ultimately making our local community safer for everyone.”

“ICE is committed to protecting our communities from criminals who show no regard for our laws or our borders,” said ICE’s Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) Field Office Director Michael W. Meade. “ICE is pleased to be working closely with the U.S. Attorney to hold criminals like this accountable.”

In October of 2021, Lopez-Garza pled guilty to charges including possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine and marijuana, possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug-trafficking offense, being an alien in the United States after a prior removal, and possession of a firearm and ammunition by a convicted felon and illegal alien.

This sentencing resulted from the collaborative efforts of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Bay County Sheriff’s Office, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Kaitlin Weiss.

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 public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](https://www.uscourts.gov/court-system/USDC-FL) website. For more information about the United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

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