



**U. S. Department of Justice**

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*United States Attorney*  
*Northern District of Florida*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FORMER GADSDEN COUNTY DEPUTY SHERIFF**  
**SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON IN CONNECTION WITH**  
**NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING INVESTIGATION**

**TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA** – Former Gadsden County Sheriff's Office deputy Joseph Barnes, Jr., 54, of Chattahoochee, Florida, was sentenced to 10 months in federal prison after pleading guilty to one count of giving a false statement to a federal officer. The sentenced was announced by Jason R. Coody, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida.

“Criminal conduct by those sworn to uphold the law represents the greatest and most harmful betrayal of public trust,” stated U.S. Attorney Coody. “The corrupt acts of an individual law enforcement officer endanger, rather than protect, the public. Moreover, such illegal conduct erodes the public's trust in the legions of brave men and women who faithfully honor their oaths and place their lives on the line each day to keep our communities safe. We will vigorously investigate and prosecute any officer who betrays both their oath and the public's trust.

Court documents reflect that during an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation, agents determined that then-deputy Barnes was actively aiding an individual involved in the distribution of narcotics in the Gadsden County area. Covert recordings captured Barnes physically examining the drug trafficker's vehicle to determine if law enforcement had attached a GPS tracking device prior to the vehicle's use to transport illegal drugs. In a subsequent covert recording, Barnes used his Gadsden County K-9, which was trained to detect the odor of narcotics, to determine if a K-9 would alert to drugs within a hidden compartment of the drug trafficker's vehicle. Barnes' K-9 alerted to the presence of the narcotics, but Barnes took no law enforcement action. Instead, Barnes gave the trafficker advice on how to evade law enforcement detection in the future. When questioned later by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Barnes made multiple false statements regarding his awareness of the drug trafficking activity and his efforts to facilitate the criminal conduct. Upon Barnes' arrest he was immediately terminated by the Gadsden County Sheriff's Office.

“Law enforcement officers are given incredible power to enforce the law and ensure justice,” said Sherri E. Onks, Special Agent in Charge of FBI Jacksonville. “The FBI and our law enforcement partners will always work together to stop abuse of power to insure the public's continued confidence in law enforcement. Any officer who tarnishes the badge by taking advantage of their position for personal gain must and will be held accountable.”

“Law enforcement officers take an oath to protect their community. When one violates that oath, it betrays the trust of the very people they are sworn to protect,” said DEA Miami Field Division Special Agent in Charge Deanne L. Reuter. “This sentence sends a clear message that DEA will continue to work with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners to hold those who participate or aid in the distribution of illegal narcotics accountable for their actions.”

The case stemmed from an extensive investigation by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), a joint federal, state, and local cooperative, which targets drug trafficking organizations. This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Drug Enforcement Administration. OCDETF Lead Task Force Attorney, Assistant United States Attorney Eric K. Mountin prosecuted the case.

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