

U.S. Attorney's Office

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Six Members of Philadelphia Police Narcotics Unit Charged in Racketeering Conspiracy

PHILADELPHIA—An indictment was unsealed today charging six members of the Philadelphia Police Department's Narcotics Field Unit (NFU) in a conspiracy to abuse their official positions to rob suspected drug dealers. Thomas Liciardello, Brian Reynolds, Michael Spicer, Perry Betts, Linwood Norman, and John Speiser are charged in a racketeering conspiracy that the indictment alleges included robbery, extortion, kidnapping, and drug dealing. In one alleged incident, a person was removed from his own home and held captive for several days in a hotel room while members of the enterprise threatened him and made threats against his family. Charges include RICO conspiracy, conspiracy to deprive of civil rights, deprivation of civil rights, Hobbs Act robbery, extortion, carrying a firearm during a crime of violence, falsifying records, and possession with intent to distribute cocaine. The alleged conduct occurred between February 2006 and November 2012, while the defendants were working as members of NFU.

The charges were announced today by United States Attorney Zane David Memeger, FBI Special Agent-in-Charge Edward Hanko, and Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey.

According to the indictment, during searches of suspected drug dealers and their homes, the defendants stole hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash and personal items, including Rolex watches and electronics and, in some incidents, used excessive force such as: leaning one victim over an 18th floor balcony

railing in an attempt to obtain information; kicking a victim in the mouth; punching a victim causing damage to his teeth; and hitting a victim in the back of the head with a steel bar.

The indictment alleges that the defendants not only stole suspected drug proceeds but also stole cash from safes in the victims' homes and, in one incident, stole the safe and then made false entries on official Philadelphia Police reports about what was seized.

“The reprehensible conduct alleged to have been committed by the six charged officers tarnishes the badge held by the thousands of officers who currently serve—and have previously served—this city with distinction,” said Memeger. “Today’s indictment makes clear that my office will continue to thoroughly investigate credible allegations of police misconduct to bring to justice those officers who disrespect the badge.”

“The crimes alleged here are indefensible,” said Hanko. “That many of the victims were drug dealers, not Boy Scouts, is irrelevant. Police officers are sworn to uphold the law—and to do it ‘by the book.’ This corrupt group chose to make their own rules. Now they will have to answer for it.”

“It’s never a good feeling when you have to deliver this type of news about members of your department; however, it shows the ongoing efforts of our FBI/Internal Affairs task force to rid the department of individuals who don’t belong in our ranks,” said Ramsey. “These officers don’t represent the majority of this department. The majority of our department was represented in the dedicated police work displayed during the past few days, working endlessly with the community and getting wanted criminals off the street. We will continue to be transparent; we will continue to pursue those involved in corruption, and remove those who don’t belong in this department. We will continue to make strong efforts in developing trusting relationships with every community as we build a safer Philadelphia for our citizens.”

According to the indictment, members of the conspiracy engaged in the following acts: -Stole suspected drug proceeds and a safe containing \$80,000 from the home of a suspected drug dealer. -Interrogated a suspect by lifting him off his feet and leaning him over a balcony railing on the 18th floor of his apartment

house. -Broke into a residence and threatened to shoot the occupant. -Stole approximately \$13,000 from a safe in a home that belonged to the parents of a person they suspected of drug dealing.

After each incident, the indictment alleges that one of the defendants, most often Liciardello, subsequently authored Philadelphia Police Department reports which falsely stated the amount of the seizure or did not mention the seizure at all.

If convicted, each of the defendants faces a maximum possible statutory sentence of life in prison, with the exception of defendant Speiser who is facing up to 40 years.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Philadelphia Police Department and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Anthony J. Wzorek.

An Indictment, Information or Criminal Complaint is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.