

PRESS RELEASE

Columbus man sentenced to life in prison for leading narcotics, sex trafficking & financial fraud conspiracies

Wednesday, October 1, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Ohio

COLUMBUS, Ohio – A Columbus man was sentenced in federal court here today to life in prison for leading drug, sex trafficking and financial fraud conspiracies and then attempting to obstruct justice and tamper with witnesses. The defendant caused an overdose death, coerced addicts into prostitution, and used threats, violence, and manipulation of drug dependencies to ensure individuals carried out his criminal schemes.

Ricco Lamonte Maye, 43, was found guilty on all counts in November 2024 following a three-week jury trial.

"Ricco Maye used unrelenting violence as a tool to maintain control of the people he needed to carry out his many criminal schemes and finance his criminal lifestyle. His actions caused lives to be lost and numerous women to endure physical and emotional pain," said U.S. Attorney Dominick S. Gerace II. "The devastating repercussions of his actions in this case, the many years of violence that are documented in his criminal history, and his continuing disregard for the harm he has caused all warrant the life sentence he received today."

Court documents and trial testimony detail that Maye used individuals to buy and sell drugs, sell women for sex, and fraudulently apply online for COVID-19 relief funds. Proceeds from all the crimes went to the defendant.

Beginning in at least 2018, Maye's drug trafficking organization primarily distributed narcotics to addicts in street-level quantities. He regularly purchased narcotics from supply sources both inside and outside of Ohio and used addicts to help sell the drugs in Columbus. In addition to cash, Maye would accept stolen goods, gift cards, Social Security numbers, and other items as payment for the drugs.

Maye initially gave drugs to women for free and later manipulated their addiction by requiring them to earn drug money through prostitution. Maye provided the means for the women to engage in prostitution – frequently obtaining hotel rooms, having the women driven to the hotels, providing cell phones, and directing Internet prostitution ads. Maye collected the prostitution proceeds, enforced specific rules on the women, and punished the women through physical violence.

Maye also provided fentanyl that resulted in an overdose death. In November 2018, Maye communicated with the victim in the hours before his death. The victim had been obtaining cocaine from Maye off and on for years and sought to obtain cocaine from Maye again on the night of his death. Maye was out of town but instructed his co-conspirators to complete the drug sale to the victim. The co-conspirator gave the victim a fatal dose of fentanyl from Maye's stash instead of the cocaine the victim sought.

Trial testimony detailed that Maye used violence against victims as part of overseeing his drug trafficking organization, including "stomping victims out," smacking them, punching them, breaking their bones and knocking out their teeth.

In a financial conspiracy, Maye and other defendants filed for and received more than \$30,000 in fraudulent Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. Maye kept all or a portion of the others' benefits.

Maye was originally charged by indictment in November 2020. Approximately one year later, the grand jury returned a 13-count third superseding indictment that charged Maye and 10 of his-coconspirators. After his initial arrest, while Maye remained in custody, he attempted to obstruct the ongoing investigation into his sex trafficking and other criminal activities and conspired to tamper with witnesses. Maye's obstruction of justice included his directing the threatened murder of a potential government witness.

Dominick S. Gerace II, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio; John Smerglia, Acting Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); Adam Lawson, Acting Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Cincinnati Division; Columbus Police Chief Elaine Bryant; the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General; Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and other officials with the Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, which was formed under Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost's Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission, announced the guilty verdicts. Senior Litigation Counsel Heather A. Hill and Assistant United States Attorney Kevin W. Kelley represented the United States in this case.

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