

Deal airs bribe case against DEA retiree - Agent tried to get drug importer's sentence reduced

Tampa Tribune, The (FL) - March 2, 2016

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- Edition: Tribune first
- Section: Metro
- Page: 2

TAMPA — When a drug importer's brother gave a retired federal agent a shopping bag stuffed with \$223,000 in hundred-dollar bills, the agent counted the money and asked the man how much was in his wallet.

The man showed retired Drug Enforcement Administration agent Samuel Murad the wallet with \$800 in cash, and Murad took that money, too.

He then warned the man to tell his brother — who was in federal prison — to “shut up” on the phone.

Murad, who was trying to help the drug importer get his 30-year prison sentence reduced, knew agents were monitoring the drug trafficker's phone calls.

Details of Murad's involvement with the drug trafficker and his family are contained in an agreement Murad, 62, has signed to plead guilty to federal charges, including tax evasion and witness tampering, that carry a combined possible sentence of 25 years in prison.

“We hope this puts this unfortunate incident to rest and allows everyone to go on with their lives,” said Murad's attorney, Greg Kehoe. “Sam was a great servant to the federal government and gave decades of service to the American people and to this community.”

Murad also admits he enlisted the help of a friend, Robert Quinn, who was still a DEA agent at the time but since has retired. Quinn pleaded guilty in November to lying to the FBI. He faces up to five years in prison and is scheduled to be sentenced in May.

Murad was the lead agent who investigated the marijuana importer, identified in court papers as J.P., who pleaded guilty in 1994 to a drug conspiracy for which he was sentenced in 1996 to 30 years in federal prison, according to Murad's plea agreement.

J.P. is in Coleman Federal Prison in Sumter County. In 2009, after Murad contacted the DEA about J.P., he was told it would be illegal for him to appear before any federal agency or employee to advocate for the drug trafficker.

So, according to court documents, Murad contacted his friend Quinn about a proposal in which J.P.'s former cellmate would help introduce a DEA plant into a cocaine trafficking operation that was under investigation. The idea was the cellmate would do the work in exchange for time off J.P.'s prison sentence.

Ultimately, an associate of the former cellmate helped the DEA make several arrests in 2012. Murad thought those arrests would lead federal prosecutors to make a motion to reduce J.P.'s prison sentence, according to Murad's plea agreement.

Murad improperly contacted Quinn to keep track of developments of the investigations and progress of efforts to get the sentence reduction for J.P., his plea agreement states.

But Murad became frustrated about not being paid by J.P.'s family for his efforts and sent a series of emails to J.P.'s brother, identified as B.P., demanding to be paid \$700,000 plus half of any money J.P. would be able to avoid turning over to the federal government as part of his original criminal case.

“If we can't come (to) some kind of understanding,” Murad wrote in one email, “then you guys get to keep your money and (J.P.) stays in jail because good luck getting him out without my testimony.”

B.P. negotiated with Murad and agreed to pay him \$500,000, according to Murad's plea agreement.

They met at a restaurant in Gainesville in August 2012 and got into B.P.'s vehicle, where B.P. gave him the \$223,000 in a shopping bag as well as the \$800 in his wallet, the plea agreement states.

Murad put the money in a safe deposit box at a bank, later laughing with Quinn over how he had to get a bigger safe deposit box because all the cash wouldn't fit in the first one he got.

Murad later made 46 separate deposits into his bank account, usually shortly after accessing his safe deposit box.

But Murad did not disclose the cash payment to the Internal Revenue Service and failed to pay taxes on it.

The FBI began to investigate, and Quinn twice met with agents and lied about what he knew. Although the government says the FBI didn't know the truth at the time of the first meeting, Quinn in November told federal Magistrate Judge Julie Sneed that the FBI knew the truth during both meetings.

Quinn's attorney, Ralph Fernandez, has said he wanted to mount a legal defense for his client but that Quinn insisted on pleading guilty because he had violated his own ethics and wanted to do the right thing.

• *Record: 486910*

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