

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of New Hampshire

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Former FCI-Berlin Chaplain Pleads Guilty to Accepting Bribes to Smuggle Drugs into Prison

CONCORD - Joseph Buenviaje, 53, of Berlin, pleaded guilty in federal court to accepting bribes from inmates and providing contraband in prison, United States Attorney Scott W. Murray announced today.

According to court documents and statements made in court, in 2015 Buenviaje began working as a chaplain at the Federal Correctional Institution in Berlin, New Hampshire. Beginning April 2018 through November 2018, while working as a chaplain, Buenviaje smuggled drugs, including Suboxone, synthetic cannabinoids, and marijuana, cellular telephones, tobacco, and other contraband into the prison in exchange for bribe payments. When interviewed by investigators in November 2018, Buenviaje admitted that he had been smuggling drugs and other contraband into the prison once or twice per week, he had received bribes of at least \$12,000, and inmates owed him an additional \$3,000 to \$5,000 for contraband he had or was going to provide.

Buenviaje also admitted that he received the contraband and some of the bribe payments by mail addressed to his ministry. Buenviaje received Suboxone—an opioid ordinarily prescribed to treat drug addiction—in its original packaging. Upon receipt, Buenviaje repackaged the drug in cellophane for distribution in the prison. Buenviaje also received notebooks with drug-soaked pages that he smuggled into the prison. After smuggling items he received into the prison, Buenviaje placed the contraband in a cabinet in the prison chapel where inmates would later retrieve the items.

In November 2018, during a consensual search of Buenviaje's car and office, investigators found 111 Suboxone strips, some of which were in Buenviaje's car and some of which were in Buenviaje's office repackaged for distribution. Investigators also located multiple notebooks that Buenviaje had placed in a cabinet in his office for an inmate. Some pages in the notebooks had been soaked with unlawful synthetic cannabinoids, specifically FUB-AMB and 5F-ADB.

Buenviaje is scheduled to be sentenced on August 1, 2019.

"Those who work in federal prisons have a responsibility to uphold the law," said U.S. Attorney Murray. "By smuggling contraband into a prison, this defendant jeopardized the safety of the inmates and staff at the facility. Such conduct simply cannot be tolerated."

"Today's guilty plea demonstrates that anyone who violates the public's trust and jeopardizes the security of federal prisons by introducing contraband will be brought to justice. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to root out smuggling schemes in federal prisons," said DOJ OIG Special Agent-in-Charge Guido Modano.

This matter was investigated by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General and FCI-Berlin's Office of the Special Investigative Supervisor. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Anna Z. Krasinski and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew T. Hunter.

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