

Former Metropolitan Correctional Center Inmates Found Guilty At Trial For Bribery And Prison Contraband Scheme

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that ANTHONY ELLISON and STARLIN NUNEZ, two former inmates of the Metropolitan Correctional Center ("MCC"), a federal jail, were found guilty today in Manhattan federal court for perpetrating wide-ranging bribery and prison contraband conspiracies with other inmates and MCC employees at the jail. Six additional former MCC inmates and three former MCC employees previously pled guilty in this case. NUNEZ will be sentenced by U.S. District Judge Andrew L. Carter, Jr., on June 6, 2024, and ELLISON will be sentenced by Judge Carter on July 9, 2024.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "Our federal detention centers are entrusted to provide care, custody, and order over inmates. Anthony Ellison, Starlin Nunez, and their co-conspirators undermined the MCC's mission through wide-ranging schemes of bribery and distribution of dangerous contraband, including drugs and cellphones. Today's unanimous verdict convicting Ellison and Nunez, and the convictions of their co-conspirators through guilty pleas, demonstrates that correctional officers and inmates who corrupt our detention centers will be held accountable."

According to the Indictment, public court filings and proceedings, and the evidence presented at trial:

NUNEZ, a/k/a "Chino," and ELLISON, a/k/a/ "Harv," were both inmates at the MCC and perpetrated with other inmates and MCC guards an extensive bribery and contraband distribution scheme within the jail between approximately 2018 and 2021. During the course of the conspiracy, between approximately 2019 and 2020, at least 10 MCC inmates, including NUNEZ and ELLISON, paid nearly \$80,000 in bribes to Perry Joyner, a

corrupt MCC correctional officer. The inmates paid the bribes through friends and relatives outside the jail, who used money transfer applications such as CashApp to transfer money to associates of Joyner. The associates then provided the bribes to Joyner himself. In exchange for those bribes, Joyner smuggled large amounts of contraband into the MCC. That contraband included drugs (such as oxycodone, alprazolam, Suboxone, marijuana, and synthetic cannabinoids, commonly known as "K2"), dozens of cellphones, and cartons of cigarettes, among other contraband. MCC inmates, including NUNEZ and ELLISON, then sold much of that contraband to other inmates at a profit as part of a widespread illicit market within the MCC. For example, ELLISON charged other inmates as much as \$100 for a single cigarette and as much as \$5,000 for a used iPhone.

In approximately early 2020, Joyner left the MCC, and the jail initiated a series of lockdowns, first to search for contraband and then in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of those lockdowns and Joyner's departure, the contraband market in the MCC dried up until ELLISON found a new source of contraband. In particular, between approximately 2020 and 2021, ELLISON conspired and had a sexual relationship with another corrupt MCC employee, Sharon Griffith-McKnight, who provided contraband to ELLISON, most of which he then re-sold to other inmates.

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ELLISON, 36, from Brooklyn, New York, was convicted of one count of conspiring to commit honest services wire fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and one count of conspiring to possess and provide prison contraband, including marijuana and other controlled substances, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

NUNEZ, 47, originally from the Dominican Republic, was convicted of one count of conspiring to commit honest services wire fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and one count of conspiring to possess and provide prison contraband, including cellphones, which carries a maximum sentence of one year in prison.

The statutory maximum penalties are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendants would be determined by a judge.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding investigative work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Justice's Office of the Inspector General, the Special

Agents from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection in New York.

The prosecution of this case is being handled by the Office's Public Corruption Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Aline R. Flodr, Jessica Greenwood, Jonathan E. Rebold, and Daniel H. Wolf are in charge of the prosecution, with the assistance of Paralegal Specialists Rachel Wechsler, Christopher de Grandpre, Andrea Gieseman, and Connor Hamill.