

PRESS RELEASE

Federal jury convicts Pharaoh's owner of multiple charges, including bribery, sex trafficking conspiracy and witness tampering

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For Immediate Release

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

BUFFALO, N.Y. - U.S. Attorney Trini E. Ross announced today that a federal jury has convicted Peter Gerace, 57, of Clarence, NY, of conspiracy to defraud the United States, bribery, sex trafficking conspiracy, maintaining a drug involved premises, narcotics conspiracy, witness tampering, and distribution of cocaine, which carry a maximum of life in prison.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joseph M. Tripi, Nicholas T. Cooper, and Casey L. Chalbeck, stated that between 2005, and 2019, Gerace, owner and operator of Pharaoh's Gentlemen's Club, conspired to defraud the United States and paid cash bribes to Drug Enforcement Administration special agent Joseph Bongiovanni. In exchange for payments he received, Bongiovanni protected Gerace and utilized his position to dissuade other members of law enforcement from conducting investigations into Gerace's activities at Pharaoh's. Bongiovanni was previously convicted and is awaiting sentencing.

In addition, between 2006, through 2019, Gerace knowingly maintained Pharaoh's Gentlemen's Club as a drug involved premises, where he and others distributed cocaine, Adderall, marijuana, and heroin. Gerace and others distributed controlled substances and used other methods to coerce Pharaoh's dancers to engage in sex acts inside Pharaoh's. Gerace also, acting with others, sent threatening Facebook messages to a witness in order to prevent her from testifying and providing information in an official proceeding.

"Peter Gerace preyed on the most vulnerable victims, using them to grow his business and his profits," stated U.S. Attorney Ross. "Peter Gerace did not want to be caught and

have his crimes exposed. However, this investigative and prosecutorial team worked tirelessly, gathering the evidence, and connecting the dots and Peter Gerace now stands convicted of some of the most heinous crimes.”

“This case showcased the reality of trafficking in Western New York and across the country. It revealed the interplay between drugs, human trafficking, how powerful men, like Peter Gerace, used victims’ drug addictions to coerce them into acts of commercial sex for pure profit,” stated Matthew Miraglia, Special Agent-in-Charge of the FBI’s Buffalo Field Office. “Today’s verdict is a win for victims of human trafficking and hope to those who don’t have a voice. The FBI remains committed to eradicating human trafficking and providing victims with resources. We encourage any victim to come forward. Call 1-800-CALL-FBI or report online at tips.fbi.gov.”

“With his conviction, Peter Gerace must face the reality that he is not above the law, nor can he escape its consequences. Homeland Security Investigations, in collaboration with our law enforcement partners, is committed to safeguarding the vulnerable from those who use bribery, manipulation, and fear for their own personal gain,” said HSI Buffalo Special Agent-in-Charge Erin Keegan. “The welfare of the public is our highest priority, and HSI Buffalo will take every necessary measure to protect the safety and wellbeing of Western New Yorkers.”

“Today, a jury found that Gerace was guilty of engaging in drug and sex trafficking, preying on vulnerable victims. He also paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to corrupt Drug Enforcement Administration special agent Joseph Bongiovanni in an attempt to skirt the law and avoid accountability,” said Ryan T. Geach, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General Northeast Region. “I would like to thank the jury for their time and careful consideration of the facts.”

The verdict is the result of an investigation by Homeland Security Investigations, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Erin Keegan, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Matthew Miraglia, and the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, under the direction of Special-Agent-In-Charge Ryan T. Geach, Northeast Region.

Sentencing is scheduled for August 15, 2025, at 9:30 a.m., before Judge Lawrence J. Vilardo, who presided over the trial of the case.