



ANTHONY G. BROWN, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Maryland Inmate Charged with Obstruction of Justice and Identity Fraud**

*Attorney General Brown Announces New Charges Against Inmate and Provides Update on RCI Prison Corruption Case*

**BALTIMORE, MD (November 15, 2023)** – Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown today announced additional charges against Jose Miguel Tapia, 38, a Maryland inmate already charged for his role in a drone contraband conspiracy at Roxbury Correctional Institution (RCI) in Hagerstown, Maryland. This investigation was led by the Maryland Office of the Attorney General’s Organized Crime Unit, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), the Washington County Narcotics Task Force, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Washington Division.

In one set of new charges, Tapia is alleged to have created a fake court commitment document and impersonated a representative from the Office of the State’s Attorney in an attempt to secure his unlawful early release from prison. As alleged in the charging document, Tapia forged a court commitment with the seal of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, which purported to award him 449 days of additional, undeserved credit for time served against his sentence, and sent it to DPSCS and the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City in an effort to try to get out of prison early. From his prison cell, Tapia then electronically faxed the fake order to the Clerk’s Office, assumed the identity of a representative from the Office of the State’s Attorney, and called the Clerk’s Office to request that the “new” commitment be processed. Fortunately, the Clerk’s Office recognized that the commitment was a forgery and did not process his release. Tapia is charged in a 13-count criminal information, including charges of obstruction of justice and forgery.

In another set of new charges, Tapia is alleged to have used a contraband cell phone within his jail cell to facilitate a complex identity fraud scheme. As alleged in the charging document, Tapia assumed the identity of dozens of people, including disguising his voice to impersonate elderly women, in an attempt to steal their money. Two of the victims had previously been life insurance clients of Tapia’s wife, Charnetta Weems. The charging document also alleges that Tapia impersonated representatives from various hospitals in an attempt to get unauthorized access to their email systems and finances. Tapia specifically targeted a company which provides electronic payments to hospitals and healthcare providers, changing the hospital’s fax number to

his own electronic fax number so that he would receive faxes intended for the hospital containing virtual credit card numbers he could steal. Tapia is charged in a 40-count criminal information, including charges of felony identity theft scheme and felony theft.

For both schemes, pursuant to Court authorization, law enforcement intercepted the communications Tapia made using his contraband cell phone. On November 5, 2022, investigators searched Tapia's RCI prison cell and recovered the contraband cell phone.

"If it had been successful, this inmate's complex scheme to impersonate government officials could have resulted in his escape from confinement and in his theft of numerous identities that could have cost several people serious financial loss," said **Attorney General Brown**. "I highly commend the vigilant correctional staff and law enforcement officers who intervened and put a stop to this ploy, underscoring the critical role that they play in preserving the security and well-being of our communities."

Tapia is already facing charges for his role in a contraband conspiracy in RCI. On May 25, 2023, Attorney General Brown [announced the indictment](#) of 15 people, including Jose Tapia, for their roles in a prison contraband conspiracy at RCI. The RCI investigation unveiled a sophisticated criminal network that employed drones, a correctional officer, and a hospital, allowing the distribution of dangerous drugs, including fentanyl, and a wide array of contraband, such as cell phones, tools, and other illicit items. As alleged in the indictments, Tapia recruited two civilians, via Instagram, and paid them to fly drones over the RCI fence and drop drugs and other contraband for Tapia to receive and redistribute within RCI. On September 7, 2022, law enforcement interrupted an attempted drone delivery and arrested two people. Investigators also recovered a drone which had crashed the evening prior while attempting to make a delivery. The recovered packages attached to the drones contained drugs, tools, cell phones, phone chargers, SIM cords, headphones, and thumb drives.

Tapia is currently held without bail at the Washington County Detention Center on the drone conspiracy charges. The drone conspiracy case is set for trial in the Circuit Court for Washington County on December 11, 2023.

In total, 11 of the 15 RCI defendants have already pled guilty in the case. The four remaining defendants have trials set in the Circuit Court for Washington County in December 2023 and January 2024.

The Attorney General's Office has had a long-standing relationship of working with DPSCS to dismantle the importation and distribution of contraband in State institutions and to hold those responsible accountable. Last month, Attorney General Brown [announced](#) that all 11 defendants have pled guilty in a separate recent contraband conspiracy case at Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI) in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

In making today's announcement, Attorney General Brown thanked Criminal Division Chief Katie Dorian, Chief of Investigations Chris Jones, DPSCS Lieutenant Valentrina White, DPSCS Lieutenant David Roman, DPSCS Detective Sergeant Michael Baier, and DPSCS Detective Sergeant Ryan Shifflet for their hard work on this case. Attorney General Brown also thanked Senior Assistant Attorney General Jared I. Albert, Senior Assistant Attorney General Zachary A. Norfolk, and Special Assistant Attorney General Brendan J. Flynn, who are prosecuting these cases.

Attorney General Brown also thanked the Special Agents from the DEA Washington Division's Hagerstown Resident Office, the Washington County Narcotics Taskforce, State's Attorney for Baltimore City Ivan J. Bates, and State's Attorney for Washington County Gina Cirincion for their assistance in this investigation.

A criminal information is merely an accusation of wrongdoing, and a defendant is presumed innocent until the State proves the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2023/111523.pdf>