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Man Sentenced to Over 7 Years in Federal Prison in V.I. District Court's First Fentanyl Conviction

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ST. THOMAS – United States Attorney Delia L. Smith announced today that Elijah Hakim, 35, of St. Thomas, was sentenced to 85 months of imprisonment in the District’s first prosecution of fentanyl possession.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 times more potent than heroin. Just two milligrams of fentanyl, or the amount that could fit on the tip of a pencil, is considered a potentially lethal dose.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, from April 2021 to May 2021, Hakim mail two packages containing fentanyl from Georgia to St. Thomas. The first package, mailed on April 22, 2021, contained 150 fentanyl pills weighing approximately 17.5 grams which were concealed in a vitamin bottle. The package was filled with spray foam and mailed from an

Atlanta, GA, post office to St. Thomas. The second package, mailed on May 18, 2021, contained 200 fentanyl pills weighing approximately 25 grams which were concealed inside a Gucci gift box. Like the first package, the second package was filled with spray foam to further conceal the pills and mailed from an Atlanta, GA, post office. Both packages were seized by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers in San Juan, PR and St. Thomas. Court documents further revealed that during this period, a victim on St. Thomas overdosed from consuming pills suspected of containing fentanyl.

At trial, the United States introduced fingerprints found on the May package which matched Hakim's fingerprints. Also admitted at trial was packaging material found in Hakim's Atlanta apartment, including a spray foam canister, bubble wrap, vacuum sealed bags and fiber tape consistent with the packaging used to conceal the fentanyl in the April and May packages.

At sentencing, the Judge Robert A. Molloy noted that the comprehensive investigation and evidence admitted at trial were more than sufficient for a jury to find Hakim guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. During his allocution, Hakim stated that he did not believe that he could be found guilty by just fingerprints. Judge Molloy responded, however, that it was not just the fingerprints, but all of the other evidence pointing to Hakim as the culprit; the fingerprints simply sealed the deal.

"Across the United States, opioids, primarily fentanyl, killed over 80,000 people in 2021 alone," stated United States Attorney Delia Smith. "Here in the Virgin Islands, we have thus far been spared the worst of the opioid epidemic, but the two shipments of fentanyl involved in this case show that we are not immune. Fortunately, the vigilance and dedication of our law enforcement partners led to the interception of these deadly drugs, and we were able to convict those responsible. We will continue to do everything in our power to keep the Virgin Islands safe from this lethal scourge."

"The defendant's lawless misuse of the U.S. Mail has finally come to a halt," said Juan A. Vargas, Acting Inspector in Charge of the Miami Division. "Postal Inspectors will continue to work collaboratively with our law enforcement partners to combine our resources and expertise to combat the perils of illegal and dangerous drug distribution."

"Our extraordinary enforcement partnerships allow us to work in unison and combat drug trafficking and the violence this brings," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Denise Foster. "It's the DEA's mission to dismantle and destroy drug trafficking organizations no matter where they originate. We will continue to work diligently with our Federal, state, and local counterparts and to bring to justice those who seek to poison our communities."

The investigation was conducted by the United States Postal Inspection Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Homeland Security Investigations, and the case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Kyle Payne and Meredith Edwards. This effort was part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multiagency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF Program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.