

U.S. Attorney Schimel: California man sentenced to 19 years in federal prison for drug trafficking and money laundering conspiracy

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Brad D. Schimel, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, announced that on February 10, 2026, Joathan Colula (age: 33) was sentenced to 228 months in federal prison for conspiracy to distribute controlled substances and for conspiracy to commit money laundering. A jury had found Colula guilty of both charges on July 17, 2025, following a nine-day trial. After completing his prison sentence, Colula will be on supervised release for an additional 60 months.

According to court documents, Colula was a source of supply for an organization that had distribution hubs throughout the Midwest, including in Milwaukee, Minneapolis/St. Paul, the greater Chicago area, and Northern Indiana. From these hubs, Colula and his fellow conspirators distributed kilogram quantities of cocaine, thousands of fentanyl pills, and pounds of methamphetamine. To disguise his illegal activity, Colula laundered the proceeds of his drug trafficking through various business bank accounts. Colula also coordinated the receipt of hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash payments that were flown from the Midwest to California.

On November 29, 2022, case agents arrested fifteen individuals associated with the organization and executed search warrants at locations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and California. The search warrants resulted in the seizure of over 10 kilograms of fentanyl, approximately 7.5 kilograms of cocaine, more than a kilogram of methamphetamine, nearly 2 kilograms of heroin, ecstasy, oxycodone, approximately 170 pounds of marijuana, marijuana edibles, over \$450,000 in cash,

and 19 firearms.

In pronouncing sentence, Chief United States District Judge Pamela Pepper noted this was a large-scale, multi-state, multi-drug operation in which Colula played an integral role. She also noted that Colula was one of the longest running members of the group.

A co-defendant, Michael Williams, also was found guilty at July 2025 trial. Williams operated the organization's primary stash location in Minneapolis. He and others mixed, tested, and packaged controlled substances, including kilogram quantities of fentanyl. He was sentenced to 240 months' imprisonment for his role in the conspiracy.

"Virtually everyone knows someone whose life has been utterly destroyed by the extraordinarily dangerous drugs that have inundated our communities of every shape and size," said U.S. Attorney Schimel. "Modern day drug traffickers have dramatically changed the very nature of our world with the violence, crime and death that follows in their wake. The judge sent the clear message that our community has had enough of the suffering wrought by these criminals."

"The Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) is proud of the role our officers played in this case and grateful for the dedication and hard work of everyone involved in this investigation. Drug traffickers bring great harm to our community and must be held accountable." said Milwaukee Police Chief Jeffrey Norman. "MPD values our collaboration with federal, state and local law enforcement partners in criminal cases like this to build a safer city for everyone to live, work and play."

"This sentence reflects the seriousness of the harm caused by large-scale drug trafficking operations and the meaningful accountability that follows," said DEA Chicago Field Division Special Agent in Charge Todd Smith. "Through close coordination with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, the North Central High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and our federal, state and local law enforcement partners, we dismantled a multi-state organization responsible for distributing dangerous drugs throughout the Midwest."

The case was investigated by agents and officers from the Drug Enforcement Administration, Milwaukee Police Department, West Allis Police Department, South Milwaukee Police Department, Wisconsin Department of Justice - Division of Criminal Investigation, and Homeland Security Investigations. The Internal Revenue

Service and the Apple Valley Police Department also participated in the investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys Elizabeth Monfils and Erica Lounsberry prosecuted the case. The investigation was supported by the North Central High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA).

The HIDTA program is an Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) sponsored counterdrug grant program that coordinates and provides funding resources to multi-agency drug enforcement task forces to disrupt or dismantle local, multi-state and international drug trafficking organizations.