



BCPO News

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Burlington Township Drug Dealer Charged in Death of Florence Man Who Fatally Overdosed

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina and Florence Township Police Chief Brian Boldizar announced that a 26-year-old Burlington Township drug dealer has been charged with causing the death of a Florence man who fatally overdosed in his home early last year on counterfeit prescription drugs that contained fentanyl.

Marques A. Palmer, of the first block of Rose Lane, was charged with Strict Liability for Drug-Induced Death (First Degree), Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance (Third Degree) and Distribution of a Controlled Dangerous Substance (Third Degree).

Palmer surrendered on January 25 and was lodged in the Burlington County Jail in Mount Holly pending a detention hearing in Superior Court. The case will be prepared for presentation to a grand jury for possible indictment.

The investigation began in April 2021, after officers from the Florence Township Police Department were dispatched to the 200 block of Fifth Avenue in the Roebling section of town for a report of an unconscious male.

Upon arrival, they found the body of 29-year-old Johnathon Mariano.

An autopsy performed by Burlington County Medical Examiner Dr. Ian Hood determined Mariano died of fentanyl toxicity. The investigation revealed that Mariano fatally overdosed on pills he purchased from Palmer. A search warrant was executed at Palmer's residence and resulted in the seizure of \$10,500 in cash and more than 1,000 pills that were determined by the Burlington County Forensic Science Laboratory to contain fentanyl.

The blue pills were identified as counterfeit controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) that were stamped with "M-30" in an attempt to resemble authentic oxycodone 30 mg tablets. It is common for counterfeit CPDs to contain fentanyl, which can be 50 times stronger than heroin, meaning those who take them are unaware of the potentially lethal consequences.

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"Counterfeit prescription drugs are usually indistinguishable from the medicine we purchase from a pharmacy, with a doctor's prescription," Prosecutor Coffina said. "This is what makes them so dangerous, as it is impossible to tell whether a pill contains the medication that is sought, or instead, a lethal dose of fentanyl. We see too often in these tragic cases that simply experimenting with presumed prescription drugs obtained from some secondary source can be deadly. We urge everyone only to take medication that is prescribed by a physician and obtained from a licensed pharmacy."

The case was investigated by the Prosecutor's Office Gang, Gun and Narcotics Task Force and the Florence Township Police Department, with assistance from the Burlington Township Police Department, the City of Burlington Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Safe Streets Task Force.

Palmer will be prosecuted by Assistant Prosecutor Michael Angermeier, supervisor of the BCPO Gang, Gun and Narcotics Task Force (GGNTF).

For more information on counterfeit CPDs, visit

<https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/DIR-035-20%20Counterfeit%20Controlled%20Prescription%20Drug%20Availability%20in%20Pennsylvania%20and%20Delaware%20%28Unclassified%29.pdf>.

All persons are considered innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

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