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United States Attorney's Office  
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## **Portland Gang Leader Sentenced to Federal Prison for Role in Drug Trafficking Conspiracy**

PORTLAND, Ore.—The leader of Portland's 18<sup>th</sup> Street Gang was sentenced to federal prison today for his role in a conspiracy to traffic large quantities of fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine into the Portland area for redistribution and sale.

Gustavo Torres-Mendez, 38, a Portland resident, was sentenced to 168 months in federal prison and five years' supervised release.

According to court documents, in 2019, following his release from state prison for first degree robbery with a firearm, Torres-Mendez established himself as the leader of the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Gang in Portland. At the time, investigators were aware that Torres-Mendez maintained a significant stature with and history in the gang developed while serving time in Oregon state prisons and for his activities out of custody.

By late summer 2022, investigators had obtained significant evidence that Torres-Mendez and a close associate were leading a criminal enterprise active in selling counterfeit Oxycodone pills containing fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine in and around the Portland metro area. In early September 2022, investigators uncovered a major effort by Torres-Mendez and several associates to collect money for a large drug purchase and, within days, the group had collected more than \$126,000 in cash. At around the same time, on September 7, 2022, police stopped a vehicle connected to the group traveling near Grants Pass, Oregon. A search of the vehicle returned more than 104 pounds of methamphetamine and eight pounds of cocaine.

On November 15, 2022, a federal grand jury in Portland returned a seven-count indictment charging Torres-Mendez and six associates for conspiring with one another to distribute fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine. Two days later, on November 17, 2022, a multi-agency law enforcement operation was conducted targeting Torres-Mendez and his associates. A search of Torres-Mendez's North Portland home returned a handgun, ammunition, tactical body armor, a small bag of "M30" counterfeit Oxycodone pills, and \$6,386 in cash. On the same day, investigators located and seized 10 additional firearms at a location in Portland used by the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Gang to store and distribute drugs and keep weapons.

On September 6, 2023, Torres-Mendez pleaded guilty to conspiring with his associates to distribute fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine. Three of Torres-Mendez's co-conspirators have also pleaded guilty and been sentenced to federal prison.

This case was investigated by the FBI and Portland Police Bureau. It was prosecuted by Thomas H. Edmonds and Nicole M. Bockelman, Assistant U.S. Attorneys for the District of Oregon.

This case is part of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), the centerpiece of the Department of Justice's violent crime reduction efforts. PSN is an evidence-based program proven to be effective at reducing violent crime. Through PSN, a broad spectrum of stakeholders work together to identify the most pressing violent crime problems in the community and develop comprehensive solutions to address them. As part of this strategy, PSN focuses enforcement efforts on the most violent offenders and partners with locally based prevention and reentry programs for lasting reductions in crime.

This prosecution is the result of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the U.S. by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.

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