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United States Attorney's Office
District of Oregon

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Southwest Washington Man Indicted for Overdose Death of Portland Teen

PORTLAND, Ore.—A federal grand jury in Portland has returned a superseding indictment charging a Vancouver, Washington man for his role in a fentanyl distribution scheme that led to the overdose death of a Portland teenager.

Manuel Antonio Souza Espinoza, 24, has been charged with conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute fentanyl, resulting in death; possession with intent to distribute fentanyl; and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

“Our community is flooded with counterfeit prescription pills that can take an innocent victim’s life in the blink of an eye. Sadly, taking a pill to get high does not have the same stigma or barrier to entry for many unwitting victims, leading to tragic results,” said Scott Erik Asphaug, U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon. “We urge everyone, regardless of age, to talk with their friends and loved ones about the risks of taking pills not prescribed to them by a medical professional. Please help to protect those closest to you while we in law enforcement continue to battle this urgent public health and safety crisis.”

“HSI, along with our law enforcement partners, pursue those fueling the opioid epidemic in this region which is claiming the lives of so many young victims,” said Special Agent in Charge (SAC) Robert Hammer, who oversees Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) operations in the Pacific Northwest. “This heartbreaking story is a constant reminder to the public that the only safe medications are ones prescribed by a trusted medical professional and dispensed by a licensed pharmacist.”

“All overdose cases are tragic, but this one involving a person so young was heartbreaking, and our sympathies are extended to his loved ones,” said Chief Chuck Lovell. “I’m grateful for the ongoing and important work of the members of PPB’s Narcotics and Organized Crime Unit, investigative assistance from the Clackamas County Interagency Task Force, and our federal partners. Any time an arrest like this is made, our city gets a little bit safer. However, addressing this issue is going to take more than law enforcement. We need the community to recognize this problem and help us promote awareness that these fentanyl pills and powder are lethal and are a significant threat to our community.”

According to court documents, the investigation that ultimately led to Espinoza’s arrest began after the tragic overdose death of a Portland teenager who, in March 2022, ingested a counterfeit “M30” Oxycodone pill manufactured with fentanyl. The investigation revealed that Espinoza—a known, high-volume Portland area drug dealer—was the third-level supplier of the counterfeit

pills. On March 31, 2022, using a confidential informant, investigators arranged a controlled purchase of 1,000 pills from Espinoza. When Espinoza arrived at the agreed upon location, he was immediately arrested. Investigators located the 1,000 pills in his vehicle along with a loaded .40 caliber handgun with extended magazine.

On March 31, 2022, Espinoza was charged by criminal complaint with possession with intent to distribute fentanyl and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. Later, on April 21, 2022, a federal grand jury in Portland indicted him on the same charges.

Espinoza made his initial appearance in federal court today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jolie A. Russo. He was arraigned, pleaded not guilty, and ordered detained pending further court proceedings.

If convicted, Espinoza faces a maximum sentence of life in federal prison.

U.S. Attorney Asphaug, Special Agent in Charge Hammer, and Chief Lovell made the announcement.

This case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations, the Portland Police Bureau, and the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office with assistance from the Clackamas County Inter-agency Task Force. Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott M. Kerin is prosecuting the case.

An indictment is only an accusation of a crime, and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Opioid abuse affects communities across the nation. Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that there were more than 100,000 drug overdoses in the U.S. during the 12-month period ending April 2021, an increase of nearly 29% from the previous 12-month period. Synthetic opioids (primarily fentanyl) accounted for more than three quarters of these deaths. Drug overdose continues to be the leading cause of injury or death in the U.S.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid 80 to 100 times more powerful than morphine and 30 to 50 times more powerful than heroin. A 3-milligram dose of fentanyl—a few grains of the substance—is enough to kill an average adult male. The availability of illicit fentanyl in Oregon has caused a dramatic increase in overdose deaths throughout the state.

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, please call 911.

If you or someone you know suffers from addiction, please call the Lines for Life substance abuse helpline at 1-800-923-4357 or visit www.linesforlife.org. Phone support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can also text "RecoveryNow" to 839863 between 8am and 11pm Pacific Time daily.

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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