

**MONTCO COURTS**

# Sixteen allegedly linked to drug trafficking network

By Carl Hessler Jr.  
chessler@21st-centurymedia.com  
@montcocourtsnews on Twitter

**NORRISTOWN** » The investigation of an alleged drug trafficking group that used stuffed animals to conceal oxycodone pills shipped from California to rented apartments in Montgomery County resulted in the arrests of 16 people, according to court documents.

"This corrupt organization... was responsible for putting thousands of oxycodone pills - opioids - onto the streets of Montgomery County since 2018, thereby fueling the opioid-heroin-fentanyl crisis we are ex-

periencing, especially considering that many people become addicted first through a legitimate opioid or (oxycodone) prescription, then move on to buying oxycodone pills on the street before moving to heroin," Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele alleged while announcing the charges on Tuesday.

Authorities alleged Amir L. "Mir" Green, 29, of the 200 block of Lippincott Avenue, Lower Merion, spearheaded the corrupt organization. Green was arraigned on multiple charges, including corrupt organizations, dealing in proceeds of unlawful activities, possession

with intent to deliver controlled substances, identity theft and carrying a firearm without a license and is being held in the county jail in lieu of \$500,000 cash bail to await his preliminary hearing.

The 15 others charged with alleged corrupt organizations- or drug-firearms-related charges by county authorities include:

- Cory Allan Scott, 19, of Lippincott Avenue, Lower Merion, identified in court papers as Green's brother.
- Kadesah Wright, 24, of the 700 block of North Brooklyn Street, Philadelphia, identified in court papers as Green's girlfriend.

- Willie Donta Webster, 29, of Los Angeles, Calif.
- Julie Arthin, 22, of the first block of Charter Oak Drive, Newtown Square, Delaware County.

- Farid Calvin Brown, 26, of the 6100 block of Callowhill Street, Philadelphia.
- Sheena Byrd, 36, of the 500 block of Highland Avenue, Wayne, Chester County.
- Michael A. Gaffney, 31, of the 1300 block of North 59th Street, Philadelphia.
- Theodore Gaines, 32, of the 5900 block of Christian Street, Philadelphia.
- Dustin S. Gilmour, 31, of the 100 block of South Bellevue Avenue, Wayne, Chester County.
- Promise Harnnett, 43,

of the 5300 block of Osage Avenue, Philadelphia.

- Jamil A. King, 33, of the 5900 block of Magnolia Street, Philadelphia.
- Tyli Lilly, 22, of the 100 block of North 62nd Street, Philadelphia.
- Anthony Brian Pollitt, 49, of the first block of Prospect Avenue, Lower Merion.
- Juanna Joan Taylor, 29, of the 300 block of Village Drive, Upper Merion.
- Robert J. Thorn, 30, of the 3200 block of Mount Vernon Street, Philadelphia.

Harnnett, King and Lilly and anyone with information about their whereabouts should call the Montgomery County Detective Bureau at 610-278-3368 or Upper Merion Police at 610-265-3232.

Bail for the other accused participants was set at between \$100,000 and \$500,000 cash. Preliminary hearings for many of the defendants, except Webster, are set for 10 a.m. July 10 before District Court Judge Cathleen Kelly-Rebar of Collegeville.

Prosecutors Samantha L. Thompson and Gabrielle C. Hughes are handling the cases.

## Ring

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plaints.

Those arrested included Green's brother, Cory Allan Scott, 19, also of the Lippincott Avenue address in Lower Merion. Green's girlfriend, Kadesah Wright, 24, of the 700 block of North Brooklyn Street, Philadelphia, and Willie Donta "Pedro" Webster, 29, of Los Angeles, Calif.

"Their corrupt organization dealt with the acquisition of large quantities of oxycodone pills, shipped by Webster through the U.S. Postal Service to various apartments in Montgomery County that Green and his co-defendants rented using fraudulent identities, stolen identities and fake

documentation," Steele alleged. "The drugs were shipped concealed inside teddy bear and bunny rabbit stuffed animals."

In court papers, detectives alleged Webster was responsible for shipping or distributing "thousands" of opiate pills to Green, delivering the drugs through the U.S. Postal Service and other shipping services to apartments leased by conspirators in King of Prussia, Norristown, Chadds Ford and Exton.

Authorities alleged the conspirators used fraudulent or stolen identities to lease the luxury apartments and to ship illegal substances.

Once the drugs arrived in Montgomery County, Green was responsible for the sale of oxycodone to sub-dealers working under his control, according

to the criminal complaint. Green and Webster furthered their drug trafficking relationship by sending currency back and forth to each other by using the U.S. Postal Service and electronic banking, detectives alleged.

Several of the alleged conspirators also illegally possessed and purchased multiple firearms, two of which had obliterated serial numbers.

"These illegal transfers of firearms, known as straw purchases, are one of the most dangerous crimes because it makes all of our communities less safe by putting guns into the hands of criminals," Steele said.

The investigation began after authorities received information that a group of individuals were fraudulently utilizing an apart-

ment in King of Prussia for the purpose of drug trafficking, according to the criminal complaint.

Green initially was charged with identity theft and related offenses. Detectives then began to listen to Green's telephone communications from inside the county jail.

"These phone calls revealed that Green was the mastermind behind a much larger criminal enterprise, involving the acquisition and sale of large quantities of controlled substances including oxycodone pills and marijuana," detectives alleged in the arrest affidavit.

"Despite his incarceration, Green facilitated his illegal drug trafficking business via the phones he had access to at the Montgomery County and Delaware County correctional

facilities," detectives alleged.

Green allegedly was able to facilitate and ultimately run the corrupt organization through his "trusted confederates" while he was incarcerated, according to court documents.

"Through the diligence and dogged pursuit by the Special Investigations Unit of the Upper Merion Police Department and their collaborative efforts with multiple agency agencies, the criminal activities of this group were discovered," Steele alleged.

Delaware County District Attorney Kat Copeland praised the cooperative effort.

"It is only through the seamless cooperation of our dedicated law enforcement partners that this large-scale drug trafficking operation was dismantled. Defendants like these perpetuate the drug epidemic that is tearing families apart, and with partners like the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office, and the many law enforcement agencies who worked on this case, we will continue to aggressively pursue those who endanger our communities," said Copeland.

In addition to county detectives and Upper Merion police, the multi-agency investigation involved the Office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Bureau of Narcotics and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Police from Lower Merion, Lower Providence, Radnor, Philadelphia, New Castle County, Delaware, Los Angeles and the Pennsylvania State Police also assisted with the investigation.

## Budget

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The budget adopted June 18 calls for using \$846,814 of reserve fund balance to close the gap between revenues and expenditures.

The 3.6 percent tax hike

exceeds the state's Act 1 tax cap of 2.8 percent, but the district applied for and received a "special exception" to exceed the index due to excessive special education costs.

The budget calls for spending more than \$21 million on special education costs in the coming

school year, a little more than 17 percent of the entire budget.

The budget deficit of \$1.3 million calculated in March was reduced to \$876,247 by April due to some changes in expenses and savings.

Although the district is weathering an increase in healthcare premiums of

nearly \$846,000, as well as a predicted increase in transportation costs of more than \$111,000; some of those increases are counter-balanced by nearly \$450,000 saved from teacher retirements and resignations and another \$188,000 saved by re-organizing the Office of Teaching and Learning, ac-

ording to the administration's budget presentation.

And it looks like the tax hikes will just keep coming.

According to a five-year forecast put together by the administration, annual tax hikes ranging from 3.35 to 3.42 percent will be required to balance future budgets.

Not raising taxes would result in an accumulated deficit of more than \$13.4 million by the 2023-24 school year, according to the forecast.

State law does not allow public school districts to have budget deficits and requires they be balanced.

## WORCESTER

# Variety club invites honored guests to help kick off summer

**WORCESTER** » Variety - the Children's Charity of the Delaware Valley welcomed Pennsylvania Senate District Director, Chief of Staff for Representative Matt Bradford, Montgomery County Commissioners and Worcester Township Supervisors to celebrate its 69th year of summer camp. On Monday, June 24, honored guests participated in a ribbon cutting ceremony, visited program areas throughout campus and joined campers in singing a traditional camp song to kick off the first day of camp and an 8-week long summer camp season.

Honored guests included Matt Brown, Chief of Staff for Representative Matt Bradford; Amy C. Smith, District Director from the Office of Senator Katie



Variety campers sing a traditional camp song at the first day of camp.

Muth; Valerie A. Arkoosh, MD, MPH, Chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners; Susan G. Caughlan, Esq., Worcester Township Board of Supervisors; and Rick DeLello, Worcester Township Board of Supervisors. Variety's mission is to enrich the lives of children and young adults with disabilities through social, educational and vocational pro-



Submitted photo

Dominique Bernardo, CEO of Variety - the Children's Charity of the Delaware Valley and Val Arkoosh, Chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners celebrate the opening of Variety's 69th summer camp season.



Submitted photo

Variety campers stand alongside (left to right) Matt Brown, Chief of Staff for Representative Matt Bradford; Amy C. Smith, District Director from the Office of Senator Katie Muth; Valerie A. Arkoosh, MD, MPH, Chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners; Dominique Bernardo, CEO of Variety - the Children's Charity of the Delaware Valley; Susan G. Caughlan, Esq., Worcester Township Board of Supervisors; Marcia Comstock, Worcester Resident and Rick DeLello, Worcester Township Board of Supervisors at the first day of camp at Variety.

grams that nurture independence and self-confidence, and prepare them for life. Each year, hundreds of families eagerly await coming "home" to Variety for a summer full of rich relationships and engaging activities. Variety summer camps include day camp, overnight camp,

extended school year (ESY) and vocational camp. In addition, Variety's piloted workforce development model VarietyWorks is making a difference in the lives of the young adults who are receiving valuable job training and independent job placement.

## Budget

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approval of the bill is still required as the fiscal year ticks down and the new 2019-20 fiscal year starts Monday.

The Republican-controlled Legislature was in the midst of a flurry of votes on bills this week as they rush to approve hundreds of pages of budget-related legislation and depart Harrisburg for the summer.

"We are working on behalf of those hard-working families that continue to send checks to this commonwealth," Topper said during floor debate. "When we talk about revenue, we understand we're not holding a hoagie sale on the Capitol steps."

In the first hour of the debate, Democrats repeatedly criticized Republican resistance to increase in the minimum wage, something Wolf has advocated for all five years he has been in office.

House Speaker Mike

Turza, R-Allegheny, repeatedly warned Democrats about bringing it up, at one point saying, "I'm going to strike any other reference to minimum wage" from the official transcript of the floor proceedings.

The \$34 billion compromise package is similar to the \$34.1 billion plan Wolf floated in February.

All told, the package authorizes almost \$2 billion in additional spending through the state's main operations account, or 6% more than the spending

lawmakers authorized last year, counting cost overruns in the current fiscal year.

Much of the extra spending covers new discretionary aid for public schools, plus extra amounts to meet rising costs for prisons, debt, pension obligations and health care for the poor.

Still, budget makers are using various cash maneuvers to veil the true cost of government operations, shifting hundreds of millions of dollars in costs to outside accounts. Bud-

get makers also have a recent history of low-balling spending estimates for health care services on the front end of the fiscal year, costs they must make up at the end of the fiscal year.

Eliminating general assistance saves an estimated \$50 million.

The program temporarily provides \$200 a month to people deemed unable to work because they are disabled or in addiction treatment. Wolf's office has not said what the governor might do, if anything, to try to save it.