

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Eight Members and Associates of the Transnational 18th Street Gang Charged with Racketeering Crimes in Queens**

Monday, June 16, 2025

**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York

**The Defendants' Crimes Involved Brutal Assaults, Extortion, Drug Trafficking, Production and Sale of Fraudulent Identification Documents, and Counterfeit Currency**

Earlier today in federal court in Brooklyn, an indictment was unsealed charging eight members and associates of the 18th Street gang, a violent transnational criminal organization, with serious crimes. Six defendants are charged with racketeering conspiracy, including predicate acts involving narcotics and firearms trafficking, production and sale of fraudulent identification documents, and extortion. Seven defendants are also charged with assaults in aid of racketeering. One defendant is charged with being an alien in possession of a 9mm semiautomatic pistol and ammunition.

Seven defendants were taken into custody in New York City and are scheduled to be arraigned this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Cheryl M. Pollak. Another defendant, currently in custody on separate criminal charges, is expected to be arraigned tomorrow.

Joseph Nocella, Jr., United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; Christopher G. Raia, Assistant Director in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI); Jessica S. Tisch, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD); and Melinda Katz, Queens District Attorney, announced the arrests and charges.

"This indictment represents a significant step in our ongoing effort to dismantle violent gang networks in our communities," stated United States Attorney Nocella. "The 18th Street gang exploited a Queens neighborhood as a hub for violence and illicit

activity. Today's arrests show the community that my Office and our law enforcement partners are working tirelessly to put these violent criminals behind bars."

Mr. Nocella expressed his appreciation to the Queens County District Attorney's Office, the FBI New York Metro Safe Streets Task Force, the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General – New York Office, the United States Secret Service, and the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Enforcement and Removal Operations, New York City Field Office, for their invaluable assistance with the case.

"These violent members and associates of the 18th Street gang allegedly relied on violence—including assault of innocent civilians and rival gang members—to exert and maintain control over a busy commercial corridor along Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights, Queens. Those arrested today acted and behaved with callous and cruel disregard for those around them. Our actions today represent yet another example of the FBI's commitment to crushing the violent transnational gangs plaguing our communities," stated FBI Assistant Director in Charge Raia.

"The defendants in this case are accused of unleashing terror onto Queens communities through brutal assaults, extortion, fraud, and drug trafficking—all in furtherance of the 18th Street gang's agenda. Every resident deserves to feel safe walking down the street, without having to worry about gang violence. My office will continue to combat violent criminal enterprises and assist partner investigations to dismantle gangs as they try to establish themselves in our neighborhoods, stated Queens District Attorney Katz. "We thank the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, the FBI and the NYPD for their hard work in this case."

As alleged in the indictment and other court filings, the 18th Street gang is a violent transnational criminal organization with members and associates throughout the United States and Central America. The gang is divided into several "cliques." The defendants are members and associates of the "54 Tiny Locos" clique, which controls a busy commercial corridor along Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights, Queens. For years, 18th Street has maintained control over this area through violence, including assaults on perceived rival gang members that often result in harm to innocent civilians. The gang financed its operations through drug-dealing and various other crimes, including trafficking in fraudulent identification documents and counterfeit currency. The gang's production and sale of fraudulent documents—including fake passports, permanent resident cards, Social Security cards, driver's licenses, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cards—was a primary driver of income for its members and associates. Members of 18th Street, including the defendants, also committed

extortion by charging “rent” to other illicit businesses operating in the area, including unregulated brothels.

Certain of the defendants are also charged in connection with three assaults in-aid-of racketeering in Queens, New York, that wounded four individuals.

#### The December 2021 Assault

As alleged, on December 31, 2021, members of 18th Street, including Bonilla Ramos, Ramirez, and a co-conspirator, assaulted two victims, including John Doe #1, outside of a bar in Queens, New York, after asking if they were in a gang. The defendants violently beat both John Doe #1 and his friend, including twice smashing John Doe #1’s head with a glass bottle of tequila, leaving him with severe lacerations to his face and nerve damage.

#### The January 2022 Assault

As alleged, on January 15, 2022, members of 18th Street attacked two victims, John Doe #2 and John Doe #3, outside a bar in Queens, New York. A co-conspirator stabbed John Doe #2 while two other defendants held him in place. John Doe #2 sustained serious injuries, including injuries to his lung. The defendants then attacked a second victim, John Doe #3, with large wooden planks, causing lacerations that required sutures. The serious injuries to John Doe #2, the victim who was stabbed, were reflected in the blood left behind after the assault.

#### The June 2024 Assault

As alleged, on June 20, 2024, members of 18th Street attacked a victim, John Doe #4, who they believed was a rival gang member, in a parking lot in Queens, New York. The assailants, including certain of the defendants, beat John Doe #4 with a bike lock and a metal chair, among other things. John Doe #4 received medical care for lacerations to his head, which required sutures.

1. The charges announced today are allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.
2. The case is part of Operation Take Back America, a Department of Justice initiative aimed at eradicating transnational criminal organizations, combating violent crime, and restoring the rule of law.
3. This prosecution also is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation. OCDETF targets the highest-level criminal

organizations threatening the U.S., using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. More info is available here: [www.justice.gov/OCDETF](http://www.justice.gov/OCDETF).

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime and Gang Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Lauren A. Bowman, Andy Palacio, and Kamil R. Ammari are in charge of the prosecution.

### **The Defendants:**

FELIX BONILLA RAMOS (also known as "Chabelo" and "Ferras")

Age: 36

Corona, New York

URIEL LOPEZ (also known as "Tanke")

Age: 30

Jackson Heights, New York

REFUGIO MARTINEZ (also known as "Cuco")

Age: 32

Elmhurst, New York

MARGARITO ORTEGA (also known as "Pinocchio")

Age: 38

Elmhurst, New York

ORLANDO RAMIREZ (also known as "Niñote")

Age: 24

Elmhurst, New York

GERMAN RODRIGUEZ (also known as "Loco")

Age: 34

Woodhaven, New York

DAVID VASQUEZ CORONA (also known as "Teba")

Age: 29

Elmhurst, New York

MARCO VIDAL MENDEZ (also known as "Matute")

Age: 36

Formerly of Elmhurst, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 25-CR-196

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*Updated June 16, 2025*

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**Component**

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