

PRESS RELEASE

First of Multiple Individuals Sentenced for Federal Kidnapping Conviction

Friday, December 20, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Michigan

DETROIT – Cortez Blake, 23, of Detroit was sentenced to 16 years and 6 months in federal prison yesterday following a conviction for federal kidnapping, United States Attorney Dawn N. Ison announced today. Ison was joined in the announcement by Special Agent in Charge James M. Deir of the ATF in Michigan.

Cortez Blake was found guilty of kidnapping on August 12, 2024, after a jury trial. In total seven people were charged with conspiracy to kidnap and kidnapping from this incident. Five people have been convicted. Blake and Nasir Lewis, 24, were convicted of kidnapping at trial, while Maijah Greene, 24, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to kidnap; and Shatonna Kimbrough, 21, pleaded guilty to kidnapping. The trial of a sixth individual, Semaj Ayers, remains pending. The final defendant, Karamoh Turner, was acquitted at trial.

Two additional people were convicted of the carjacking that precipitated the kidnapping. Jamar Lee-Stinson pleaded guilty to carjacking and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence and was sentenced to 11 and a half years in prison in May 2024. Amiaya Bryant also pleaded guilty to carjacking and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence and was sentenced to 10 years in prison in June 2024.

During the trial, the evidence established that the defendants worked with others to kidnap and beat their victim. The kidnappers wrongly believed the victim took part in a carjacking and the kidnapping was to retaliate and extract information from the victim. According to the testimony, a group of armed men took the victim from Sinai-Grace Hospital. The kidnappers first drove the victim to an empty lot in Detroit where the victim was beaten. The kidnappers then took the victim to a residence controlled by Blake, where the victim was held at gunpoint and beaten intermittently for hours. Finally, the victim was abandoned miles away on the roadside.

At trial, the evidence further established that the victim was held against her will at gunpoint in a house in Detroit where she was physically beaten. This was done in part to get information from her. Cellphones were used to recruit and direct others to join the kidnapping of the victim. Cortez Blake intentionally assisted in the kidnapping by participating in the beating and interrogation of the victim.

"Street justice cannot take place in this community. This sentence sends the first message in this case, and beyond, that one alleged wrong cannot justify retribution. This senseless cycle of violence will not be tolerated, and my office will continue to hold those who engage in violence, even if in the name of vengeance, accountable no matter the circumstances," said U.S. Attorney Ison.

"This sentence is proof that ATF Detroit and its state and local partners have zero tolerance for anyone who chooses to use an illegal firearm to retaliate, intimidate, and/or harm a member of our community. Cortez Blake's actions are reprehensible. He and his partners-in-crime kidnapped and beat a Detroit community member with an illegal firearm. Blake is a common-day coward who puts gang membership and nonsensical gang loyalty above everything else, including his humanity. In my experience," said Special Agent in Charge James Deir, "Blake is an ATF posterchild of the type of thug ATF is laser-focused on identifying, prosecuting, and ultimately removing from our community. As such, he is the most deserving candidate for federal prosecution and Detroit is safer with him not in the city any longer."

The United States Attorney's Office and the ATF are focused on prosecuting those individuals who are using firearms to commit violent acts against people in the Eastern District of Michigan. The strategy is a part of the United States Attorney's Office's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) initiative. PSN continues to be the centerpiece of the Department of Justice's violent crime reduction efforts. Through PSN, a broad spectrum of stakeholders works together to identify the most pressing violent crime problems and develop comprehensive solutions to address them. PSN is an evidence-based program that focuses enforcement efforts on the most violent offenders and partners with locally based prevention and reentry programs to pursue lasting reductions in crime.

These charges are just some of the tangible results of this joint effort. The United States Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners will continue to work together to reduce violence in our communities. Along with ATF, this case has been investigated with the assistance of the Office of Inspector General – U.S. Department of Labor, the United States Marshals Service, the Detroit Police Department's Gang Intelligence Unit, and the Michigan Department of Corrections.

Updated December 23, 2024

Topic

VIOLENT CRIME

Component

[USAO - Michigan, Eastern](#)