

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **68 Defendants Charged in Indictment of Dozens of Members and Associates of San Fernando Valley White Supremacist Gang**

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California

*LOS ANGELES* – Federal and local law enforcement have arrested 42 members and associates of the SFV Peckerwoods, a San Fernando Valley-based white supremacist street gang, on a 76-count federal grand jury indictment alleging they engaged in a years-long pattern of racketeering activity that included trafficking of drugs – including fentanyl – illegal firearms possession, and COVID-19 benefits and loan fraud, the Justice Department announced today.

The indictment unsealed today charges a total of 68 defendants with a score of federal crimes: conspiracy to violate the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, distribution of controlled substances, bank fraud, conspiracy to commit bank fraud, aggravated identity theft, possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime, unlawful possession of a firearm and ammunition by a felon, and possession of 15 or more unauthorized access devices.

The 29 defendants arrested today are expected to be arraigned this afternoon in United States District Court in downtown Los Angeles. Prior to today's takedown, 13 defendants were already in custody.

During the investigation, law enforcement seized large quantities of illegal firearms, and dozens of pounds of fentanyl, methamphetamine, and heroin, according to the indictment.

"The Peckerwoods' violent white-supremacist ideology and wide-ranging criminal activity pose a grave menace to our community," said United States Attorney Martin Estrada. "By allegedly engaging in everything from drug-trafficking to firearms offenses to identity theft to COVID fraud, and through their alliance with a neo-Nazi prison gang, the Peckerwoods are a destructive force. In prosecuting the members of the

Peckerwoods criminal organization, our office is carrying out its mission to protect the public from the most dangerous threats.”

“The Justice Department has dealt a decisive blow to the San Fernando Valley (SFV) Peckerwoods, a violent white supremacist gang that we charge is responsible for trafficking deadly fentanyl and other drugs, committing robberies, and perpetrating financial fraud to fund both their criminal enterprise and that of the Aryan Brotherhood,” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “With today’s charges and arrests, the Justice Department, together with our state, local, and federal partners has targeted the heart of this gang’s operations, and we will continue to zero in on the criminal enterprises that endanger our communities.”

“This operation, led by our Joint Terrorism Task Force, disrupted a racially motivated violent extremist group who engaged in a wide range of criminal activity,” said Akil Davis, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI Los Angeles Field Office. “This case strikes at the heart of our collective mission to rid our communities of the corrosive elements that fuel violence and extremism that greatly impact our way of life. The FBI, along with our federal, state, and local partners, remains strongly committed to working every day to make sure the people of the Southland remain safe.”

“The San Fernando Valley Peckerwoods, the Aryan Brotherhood and their associates are fused by one thing: hatred,” Matthew Allen, Special Agent in Charge, DEA Los Angeles Field Division. “It appears, however, that the business of hate was not enough for them. Driven by greed, they engaged in other crimes, including drug distribution, pushing out deadly fentanyl onto our streets. Operating from corners of the San Fernando Valley, they conducted their crimes within and beyond the 8-1-8 community. Today’s large-scale indictments and arrests reflect our relentless commitment to dismantling criminal organizations that continue to harm our communities.”

According to the indictment that a grand jury returned on September 26, the Peckerwoods is a street gang based in communities in the San Fernando Valley whose members engage in a wide variety of criminal activity, including drug trafficking, violent crime, and fraud. As a white supremacist gang, the Peckerwoods at times takes orders from the Aryan Brotherhood, California’s dominant prison-based white supremacist gang, and maintains an alliance with the Mexican Mafia prison gang, which controls most Latino street gangs in California. The Peckerwoods use Nazi tattoos, graffiti, and iconography to indicate their violent white supremacy extremist ideology. These tattoos and iconography include swastikas, the symbol “88”, used by violent white supremacy extremists as code for “Heil Hitler,” and images of Nazi aircraft.

Members and associates of the gang used social media to share information with each other about their criminal activities and gang rules, to identify gang members in good standing, and to target people who broke the gang's rules. The social media use included a members-only Facebook group and private, direct messages between the gang's members and associates.

From at least December 2016 to September 2024, Peckerwoods members conducted and participated in the affairs of their criminal enterprise by engaging in violence and threats of violence to preserve and expand the gang's criminal operations, which promoted a climate of fear. Members and associates of the gang illegally maintained firearms and ammunition in furtherance of these aims.

To generate revenue for the gang, its members trafficked narcotics, including fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine. Specifically, lead defendant Claire Patricia Haviland, 62, of Chatsworth, and co-defendants Brian Glenn Ekelund, 53, of Chatsworth, and Brianne Brewer, 38, of North Hollywood, maintained and oversaw drug stash houses where large quantities of fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, and other drugs were stored prior to distribution. Haviland and Ekelund allegedly mailed illegal drugs to customers and used applications such as Zelle and CashApp to receive money from drug buyers and send money to their drug sources.

They also generated revenue via robberies and financial fraud and participated in identity theft schemes. For example, from at least March 2021 to July 2023, defendants Sean Craig Gluckman, 35, of Encino, Maria Anna James, 30, of Canyon Country, and others submitted false and fraudulent applications for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which was designed to aid businesses harmed by the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. The defendants – posing as sole proprietors – signed fraudulent PPP loan applications on behalf of individuals incarcerated in California state prisons and collected a portion of the fraudulently obtained proceeds from co-conspirators as payment for their assistance.

Gluckman in April 2021 submitted an application that falsely stated he was a self-employed "artist/writer" with a gross income of nearly \$250,000. Later that month, he obtained a PPP loan in the amount of \$20,833. In a separate scheme, Gluckman submitted fraudulent unemployment insurance (UI) applications in the names of other people to the California Employment Development Department (EDD) to fraudulently obtain jobless benefits.

"The proliferation of gang related organized crime deteriorates the core of our society," said Los Angeles Police Chief Dominic Choi. "Taking guns out of the hands of gang members and drugs from our streets is just one more step towards reducing this

deterioration. Today is yet another example of how local, regional, and federal law enforcement, with a matched dedication, are working together to investigate, apprehend and prosecute criminals.”

“When criminal organizations cross jurisdictional lines, it makes conducting investigations and subsequent prosecutions much more difficult,” said Ventura County Sheriff Jim Fryhoff. “Having our federal law enforcement partners involvement in such cases greatly enhances our ability to protect not only the citizens of our county, but also those of our region of the state.”

“The DOL-OIG will continue to allocate investigative resources to support our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners in the fight against organized crime, particularly when it involves matters within our jurisdiction,” said Quentin Heiden, Special Agent in Charge of the United States Department of Labor Office of Inspector General’s Western Region. “This investigation reinforces our commitment to protecting the integrity of the nation’s unemployment system.”

*An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.*

If convicted, the defendants would face a statutory maximum sentence of life in federal prison.

The FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Los Angeles Police Department, and the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office are investigating this matter. Other law enforcement agencies that assisted in today’s takedown are the Simi Valley Police Department; California Highway Patrol; the Glendale Police Department; the Burbank Police Department; the Redondo Beach Police Department; the Beverly Hills Police Department; the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department; the United States Marshals Service; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Police; the United States Department of Labor; the Federal Bureau of Prisons; the Los Angeles County Probation Department; the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services; the Pasadena Fire Department; United States Customs and Border Protection; and IRS Criminal Investigation.

Assistant United States Attorneys Reema M. El-Amamy of the Terrorism and Export Crimes Section, Jeremiah M. Levine of the Violent and Organized Crime Section, and Alexander Su of the Asset Forfeiture and Recovery Section are prosecuting this case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

On September 15, 2022, the Attorney General selected the U.S. Attorney's Offices for the Central and Eastern Districts of California to jointly head one of three national COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force Teams. The Department of Justice established the Strike Force to enhance existing efforts to combat and prevent COVID-19 related financial fraud. The Strike Force combines law enforcement and prosecutorial resources and focuses on large-scale, multistate pandemic relief fraud perpetrated by criminal organizations and transnational actors, as well as those who committed multiple instances of pandemic relief fraud. The Strike Force uses prosecutor-led and data analyst-driven teams to identify and bring to justice those who stole pandemic relief funds. Additional information regarding the Strike Force may be found at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-covid-19-fraud-strike-force-teams>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at (866) 720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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### **Topics**

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