

PRESS RELEASE

Owner of Boston Pizzeria Chain Sentenced to More than Eight Years in Prison for Forced Labor

Monday, October 28, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts

Defendant physically abused and threatened six employees for nearly a decade

BOSTON – The owner of Stash’s Pizza, a pizzeria chain in Massachusetts, was sentenced on Oct. 25, 2024 for forced labor charges. The defendant forced or attempted to force six victims to work for him and comply with excessive workplace demands through violent physical abuse; threats of violence and serious harm; and repeated threats to report the victims to immigration authorities for deportation.

Stavros Papantoniadis, a/k/a “Steve Papantoniadis,” 49, of Westwood, Mass., was sentenced by Chief U.S. District Judge F. Dennis Saylor IV to 102 months in prison, one year of supervised release and ordered to pay a \$35,000 fine. At a jury trial in June 2024, Papantoniadis was convicted of three counts of forced labor and three counts of attempted forced labor. Papantoniadis has remained in custody since his arrest on March 16, 2023.

“Labor trafficking exploits the vulnerable through fear and intimidation, all in pursuit of the almighty buck. That is what Stavros Papantoniadis did when he violated the rights of the people working in his restaurants. He deliberately hired foreign nationals who lacked authorization to work in the United States and then turned their lack of immigration status against them, threatening them with deportation and violence to keep them under his control,” said Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy. *“I commend the bravery of the victims here for speaking out and taking a stand*

against their trafficker. I hope that their strength to speak out sends a message to others whose rights are being abused that the federal government will not tolerate labor trafficking. The stiff sentence imposed on Mr. Papantoniadis demonstrates that there are grave consequences for employers who engage in this type of conduct.”

“Stavros Papantoniadis exploited and abused his employees, denying them the basic dignity every person deserves. Today’s significant sentence sends a message to employers — employees deserve to work in safety, free from harassment and abuse and exploitative employers will be held to account,” said Special Agent in Charge Michael J. Krol for Homeland Security Investigations, New England. “Labor exploitation targets the disenfranchised in our society but we want employees to know that they have a voice and HSI is working with our partners to uphold and enforce labor laws.”

“Stavros Papantoniadis used threats of arrest, deportation, reprisals, and physical violence to ensure his employees worked for wages lower than required by the Fair Labor Standards Act. Today’s sentencing affirms the Office of Inspector General’s commitment to work with our law enforcement and Wage and Hour Division partners to aggressively investigate labor trafficking by individuals who enrich themselves through coercion or force,” said Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent-in-Charge, Northeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

Papantoniadis forced or attempted to force five men and one woman to work for him through violent physical abuse, threats of abuse, and repeated threats to report victims to immigration authorities to have them deported. Papantoniadis thinly staffed his pizza shops, and purposely employed workers without immigration status to work behind the scenes, for 14 or more hours per day and as many as seven days per week. To maintain control of those undocumented workers, he made them believe that he would physically harm them or have them deported. He monitored the workers with surveillance cameras, which he accessed from his cell phone, and constantly demeaned, insulted and harassed them. When Papantoniadis learned that one victim planned to quit, he violently choked him, causing that victim to flee the pizza shop and run to safety in the parking lot. When other victims separately expressed their intentions to quit, Papantoniadis told one victim that he would kill him and call immigration authorities; and he threatened another worker by telling him he knew where the victim lived. When another worker tried to leave and drive away from one of Papantoniadis’ pizza shops, Papantoniadis chased the victim down Route 1 in Norwood, Mass., and falsely reported the victim to the local police in an effort to pressure the victim to return to work at the pizza shop.

Papantoniadis is the owner and operator of Stash's Pizza, a chain of pizzerias with locations in Dorchester and Roslindale, and previously had pizzerias in Norwood, Norwell, Randolph (d/b/a Boston Pizza Company), Weymouth (d/b/a Pacini's Italian Eatery), and Wareham, Mass.

Members of the public who believe they are a victim of labor trafficking or have information about labor trafficking, please call 888-221-6023, Option 5 or send an email with contact information to USAMA.VictimAssistance@usdoj.gov.

Acting U.S. Attorney Levy, HSI SAC Krol and DOL-OIG SAC Mellone made the announcement today. Assistance was provided by the Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, the Boston Police Department, and the Norwood Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Timothy E. Moran, Chief of the Organized Crime & Gang Unit, and Brian A. Fogerty of the Civil Rights & Human Trafficking Unit prosecuted the case.

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