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Department of Justice

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Southern District of Ohio

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Columbus Man Pleads Guilty to Dealing Lethal Heroin Fentanyl Mix

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Richard R. Edwards, 28, of Columbus, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court to distributing heroin and fentanyl that resulted in the death or serious bodily injury of another.

Benjamin C. Glassman, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, Steve Francis, Special Agent in Charge, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Franklin County Prosecutor Ron O'Brien, Franklin County Sheriff Dallas Baldwin and other members of the Sheriff's Office's Heroin Overdose Prevention & Education (HOPE) Task Force announced the plea entered into today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Elizabeth A. Preston-Deavers.

In the statement of facts filed as part of the plea agreement in this case, Edwards admitted that his distribution of heroin and fentanyl led to a non-fatal overdose of a Columbus man in August of 2016, and a fatal overdose of a Columbus woman in December of 2016.

Edwards was arrested in March and has remained in custody since.

Distribution of heroin in this case is punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

"We will continue to work with all of our law enforcement partners through initiatives like the HOPE Task Force to bring the available federal tools and resources to bear on the narcotics traffickers who are causing so many deaths and overdoses in our Southern Ohio communities," U.S. Attorney Glassman said.

"A fatal dose of fentanyl can fit inside the tip a finger nail, making it the deadliest chemical substance that we have to contend within the law enforcement community," said Special Agent in Charge Francis. "Today's guilty plea demonstrates our unrelenting resolve to bring to justice those responsible for distributing this lethal poison in our communities."

"This is the first case investigated by the Franklin County HOPE Task Force to be adjudicated at the Federal Level since its inception in January of 2016," said Sheriff Baldwin. "The HOPE Task Force is a Franklin County Sheriff's Office led initiative which investigates Fatal and Non-Fatal overdose incidents with the combined objectives of incarcerating those responsible for the sale of deadly and dangerous opiates which cause death and/or serious physical harm, and linking survivors of Non-Fatal overdoses with Healthcare, Treatment, and Recovery programs overseen and administrated by Southeast Healthcare Inc."

"This case is another example of the collaborative effort between all agencies working together in the prosecution of criminals selling drugs on the streets that are killing people," Prosecutor O'Brien said. "We will continue to stand united against this kind of criminal conduct that continues to destroy lives on a daily basis."

U.S. Attorney Glassman commended the investigation of this case by HSI and HOPE Task Force officers. Deputy Criminal Chief Michael J. Hunter is representing the United States in this case.

Established in 2016, the Heroin Overdose Prevention & Education Task Force was created as a restructuring of the Franklin County Drug Task Force. Experienced narcotics and homicide detectives working on the HOPE Task Force are treating opiate overdose scenes as crime scenes; investigating the source of the supply that caused the overdose. This case represents the first federal prosecution of a "death-resulting" case in Columbus that stemmed from a joint investigation with the HOPE Task Force.

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Topic(s):

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