Man Who Allegedly Bribed TSA Employee in Order to Smuggle Marijuana on Domestic Flight Arrested

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FBI

Los angeles, CA (RPRN) 10/19/11 — TSA Employee Also Arrested

A domestic airline passenger and a TSA employee were arrested Sunday after attempting to smuggle several pounds of marijuana on a flight from Los Angeles to Boston's Logan Airport, announced Steven Martinez, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office, and André Birotte Jr, United States Attorney in Los Angeles.

Millage Peaks, 23, of Los Angeles, and Dianna Perez, 28, of Inglewood, were taken into custody on Sunday and were held overnight at the Metropolitan Detention Center. According to criminal complaints filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles earlier today, Perez, who is an employee with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), was charged with accepting a bribe in connection with allowing bags containing a controlled substance to pass unimpeded through airport security. Peaks was charged with bribing a public official.

On Sunday, October 16, the Los Angeles Airport Police (LAXPD) responded to a report by a baggage handler with American Airlines who smelled marijuana emanating from one of the bags checked in by Peaks. Peaks' bags, which were destined for Boston's Logan Airport, were then removed and searched by TSA personnel. Fourteen plastic bags, containing what LAXPD officers believed amounted to approximately 10-15 pounds of marijuana, were found concealed inside Peak's bags.

After initial interviews and investigation, officers with LAX PD detained Dianna Perez, who was employed by the TSA, and Peaks, then contacted FBI agents assigned to Los Angeles International Airport for further investigation.

The complaint alleges that Perez agreed to accept a bribe to use her position as a TSA officer to allow Peaks' checked luggage to bypass airport security without being screened by other TSA officers. Perez has been a TSA officer for more than seven years and is responsible for loading luggage onto x-ray machines, and searching them. If luggage sets off an alarm for explosives or dangerous items, Perez is certified to clear bags, according to the complaint.

The complaint alleges that Peaks planned to travel to Boston to resell the marijuana which he obtained the previous day in San Francisco for $38,000.

Prior to purchasing the marijuana, Peaks had arranged for Perez to help him move bags containing the marijuana through airport security for a fee, according to the affidavit in support of the criminal complaint. He intended to pay Perez $500 for each bag she allowed to bypass security, according to the complaint.

The complaint further alleges that Peaks told investigators that Perez helped him circumvent security on approximately nine previous occasions. Each time, Peaks would pay Perez approximately $500 for each bag that she moved past security, amounting to approximately $5,000-6,000.

Peaks told agents he met Perez on Sunday morning at the curbside check-in area outside Terminal 4 at LAX, at which time Perez took his bags to a TSA screening room. The complaint alleges that Perez returned a few minutes later and waved at Peaks, indicating that “everything was good.” Peaks also told investigators that Perez advised him how to pack the marijuana to avoid detection and told him that she moved drugs through security on other occasions. During an interview with Perez, Perez told agents she helped several other people. Perez and Peaks had an initial appearance in U.S. District Court this afternoon and were each freed on a $20,000 bond. They are scheduled to be arraigned on November 14.

This investigation was conducted by the Los Angeles Airport Police Department, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and the FBI.

Perez and Peaks will be prosecuted by the United States Attorney’s Office in Los Angeles.

If convicted on the charge of accepting a bribe, Perez faces a statutory maximum penalty of 15 years in federal prison. If convicted on the charge of paying a bribe, Peaks faces a statutory maximum penalty of 15 years in federal prison.

A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.

MEDIA CONTACT:
FBI Media Relations: 310 996-3343
United States Attorney’s Office Public Affairs: 213 894-6947

Media Contact Name: FBI Media Relations

Media E-mail: fbi@media.fbi.gov

Media Phone: 310-996-3343

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