Beat: News

Connecticut Man Charged with Attempted Human Smuggling

Fagner Chaves De Lima

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USPA NEWS - A Connecticut man was arrested yesterday on charges that he allegedly attempted to smuggle an individual from Brazil into the United States.

Fagner Chaves De Lima, 41, of East Hartford, Conn., was charged with one count of attempted human smuggling. De Lima will appear in federal court in Worcester today before U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge David H. Hennessy.

“It is alleged that Mr. De Lima orchestrated an elaborate and manipulative human smuggling operation. For a steep price, Mr. De Lima allegedly made arrangements for victims to travel from Brazil to the United States, and then extorted the vulnerable victims and their families for more money, even threatening harm,” said United States Attorney Rachael S. Rollins. “As we all know, smuggling operations abuse, exploit and endanger defenseless victims. Combating human smuggling and trafficking networks is a top priority of our office. This alleged crime is an affront to human dignity and a danger to national security.”

“What Fagner Chaves De Lima is accused of doing is disgraceful. In attempting to smuggle human beings into the United States for his own financial profit and then allegedly extorting them for more money, under the fear of harm, he has demonstrated a deliberate disregard for the safety of their lives, and our country’s laws that are in place to ensure the public’s safety,” said Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Boston Division. “It’s important for anyone who is a victim of human smuggling to know that we prioritize the safety of victims when working with our law enforcement partners to bring international human smugglers to justice.”

According to charging documents, De Lima ran a business that illegally smuggled individuals from Brazil into the United States. It is alleged that, in exchange for payments of thousands of dollars, De Lima made travel arrangements for clients to illegally enter the United States from Brazil by plane or bus and arranged lodging accommodations for clients during their travel. In addition, De Lima allegedly extorted clients while their journey to the United States was underway by threatening to harm them and/or their family if they did not pay additional money.

In May and June 2022, an undercover agent initiated communications with De Lima over WhatsApp under the guise that the agent sought to have his sister and niece smuggled into the United States. The undercover agent offered to pay $15,000 for De Lima’s services, and De Lima allegedly agreed to the arrangement. According to the charging documents, De Lima stated during these communications (translated from Portuguese) that he had been engaged in human smuggling “for 20 years,” and that he will smuggle individuals “whether you have a visa, no visa, or if . . .[they] are wanted by the police.” De Lima also allegedly acknowledged in later messages that human smuggling is “dangerous.” On June 16, 2022, De Lima traveled to Worcester to meet with the undercover agent, during which De Lima allegedly accepted two checks for the agreed upon total of $15,000 in exchange for his smuggling services and requested the sister’s passport and Social Security number.

The charge of attempted human smuggling provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of $250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

U.S. Attorney Rollins and FBI Boston SAC Bonavolonta made the announcement.

Valuable assistance was provided by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Yuma Field Office; Homeland Security Investigations in Yuma; U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Boston Division; and the Marlborough, Worcester, Hartford (Conn.) and East Hartford (Conn.) Police Departments; Assistant U.S. Attorney John T. Mulcahy of Rollins’ Civil Rights Enforcement Team is prosecuting the case.

The Civil Rights Enforcement Team (CRET) was created in 2010 to coordinate the efforts of the U.S. Attorney’s Office in enforcing federal criminal civil rights laws. CRET is composed of Assistant U.S. Attorneys and professional staff from the criminal and civil divisions of the office. The primary goals of the CRET is to develop a comprehensive enforcement strategy to address civil rights

issues that arise in the District of Massachusetts; to uphold the constitutional rights of all residents, particularly some of the most vulnerable members of society; and to enforce federal statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, disability, religion, familial status, and national origin.

If you believe that you or someone you know may be a victim of human smuggling/trafficking, please contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, or Text 233733.

The details contained in the charging documents are allegations. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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