



Texas drug ring members sentenced to prison include sheriff, teacher

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A former [South Texas](#) sheriff and a Houston elementary school teacher were among 11 people sentenced to prison Thursday for their role in a conspiracy that moved marijuana and cocaine from [Mexico](#), through Houston and as far as [Delaware](#).

The sheriff's involvement illustrated how intertwined public corruption and drug trafficking are even on the [U.S.](#) side of the border. Since late 2006, more than 80 law enforcement officers working on the U.S.-Mexico border at the local, state and federal level have been convicted of corruption-related charges, according to an [Associated Press](#) tally.

[U.S. District Judge Randy Crane](#) sentenced former [Starr County](#) Sheriff Reymundo "Rey" Guerra to 64 months in federal prison and four years of supervised release for helping Mexican smugglers move drugs through his county in exchange for thousands of dollars in bribes. The sentence was less than the eight to 10 years recommended under federal sentencing guidelines, but Guerra admitted his guilt early and cooperated with authorities, Crane said.

[FBI agents](#) arrested Guerra at his office in October as part of operation "Carlito's Weigh." Prosecutors termed Guerra a "minor participant" in the drug trafficking conspiracy that so far has netted indictments against 28 people.

Guerra, 52, who prosecutors said made it easier for drugs to move through his county, pleaded guilty in May to conspiring to distribute narcotics. He apologized Thursday to his family, community and "to the men and women who wear the badge. I'm sorry I let them down."

Crane told Guerra that "it's a stain on the badge when somebody in your high position engages in organized crime like this."

"For really pennies, nickels, you were influenced by these people," the judge said.

Guerra received one payment of \$3,000 and several more payments of \$3,000 to \$5,000, but authorities aren't sure how much he actually earned in bribes. His attorney [Philip Hilder](#) said the money came as gifts from lead defendant [Jose Carlos Hinojosa](#) and was not paid in direct exchange for information from Guerra.

By sharing information, and in at least one instance providing false information so a deputy would close a case related to the drug trafficking operation, Guerra made it easier for Hinojosa to move drugs through his county, prosecutors said.

Hinojosa, who is still awaiting sentencing, had once worked in law enforcement in Mexico. He later began working for the Zetas, the brutal enforcers of the [Gulf Cartel](#).

Assistant U.S. Attorney Toni Trevino said investigators had no evidence Guerra ever cleared an area of law enforcement so that drug loads could move through his county. But he did tell Hinojosa when there would be extra patrols so smugglers could avoid them.

Guerra complicated the ongoing investigation of Hinojosa's smuggling ring because federal agents had to limit their activities in Starr County for fear that Guerra would alert Hinojosa, Trevino said.

The wide-ranging indictment swept up those who organized the drug smuggling across the border, drivers who carried drugs to Houston and brought the cash proceeds back to South Texas and distributors who mailed drugs to customers as far away as Delaware.

A small player in that distribution operation was Houston school teacher Sharletha Woodard whose boyfriend John [Louis Jordan](#) said he received drugs on consignment and distributed them.

Woodard, a fifth-grade teacher with a master's degree, was sentenced Thursday to nearly four years in prison for sometimes mailing packages of cocaine for Jordan, who received a 15-year sentence.

"I made a mistake," Woodard said. "This is a lifestyle that I really wouldn't take part in."

Before announcing her sentence, Crane said "one of the lessons is nobody's above the law."

"I'm really surprised you're still teaching," he said. Woodard had said she taught as recently as Wednesday.

The [Houston Independent School District](#) could only say that a teacher by that name worked at Robert Lee Frost Elementary School in [South Houston](#), and officials were checking to see if it was the same person, spokeswoman [Lisa Kinney](#) said.