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February 13, 2026

TWO OHIO MEN CONVICTED IN LARGEST PRISON CONSPIRACY CASE IN STATE HISTORY

(ZANESVILLE, Ohio)

February 12, 2026, two men, Norman V. Whiteside, 71, of Columbus and Justin A. Alexander, 46, of Zanesville were found guilty and convicted by a jury of their peers following a trial spanning two weeks in the Muskingum County Court of Common Pleas.

Jurors found both Whiteside and Alexander guilty of the following counts:

1. Engaging in a Pattern of Corrupt Activity, a felony of the first degree.

2. Trafficking in Drugs, a felony of the fourth degree

3. Illegal conveyance of drugs into a prison, a felony of the third degree

4. Money laundering, a felony of the third degree.

Separately, and in addition, Justin Alexander was found guilty of the following counts:

1. Trafficking in methamphetamine, a felony of the first degree

2. Trafficking in cocaine, a felony of the first degree

3. Additional counts of illegal conveyance, felonies of the third degree

4. Conspiracy to manufacture drugs, a felony of the second degree

5. Forty counts of money laundering, felonies of the third degree

6. Trafficking and possession of "Pinaca" and "Butinaca," schedule 1 substances

During the trial, jurors learned from Assistant Prosecutor John Litle, who handled the case, and Investigator Justin Bryant who led the investigation, about a massive, state-wide in-prison drug smuggling operation that laundered its profits through a financial hub operating in Zanesville, Ohio. Jurors also learned that Justin Alexander was the operation's leader and main conspirator.

Alexander was involved in multiple smuggling schemes while incarcerated, including one where a book would be manufactured and soaked in drugs, the use of drones, drugs hidden in playing cards, and most successfully, an operation that involved delivering drugs into the institution using an "Attorney control number."

Jurors learned that an attorney control number is a safety protocol used by the prison system to provide inmates privacy in their legal mail while also preventing legal mail from being used as a means of getting drug-soaked paper into the institution.

In addition, Jurors learned that the prison term for drug-soaked paper is "Toon", and that it is sold in increments the size of a prisoner's face on their ID card. A single sheet of drug-soaked paper can produce 88 prisoner ID faces, and each sheet of paper could net Alexander more than $8,000.

Analyst for the Ohio Narcotics Information Center Duke Durant, performed communication analysis on the case, linking Alexander to multiple female telecommunications consorts outside of the prison system. Durant's analysis led to the discovery of multiple plots to traffic drugs into the prison system, and jurors learned about Alexander's techniques and processes early in the trial.

Ohio State Highway Patrol Sgt. Frank Applegate took Durant's intelligence and gathered financial, tax and telecommunications records from across the country.

Chris Sands, an intelligence analyst who works for the Ohio Attorney General's office, explained his analysis of thousands of financial transactions showing all of the players in the drug-smuggling operation as they moved and utilized Alexander's drug profits.

Whiteside's Involvement:

Norman Whiteside's role in the operation depended upon his access to the attorney control number utilized by the Hillard Abroms Law Office, in Columbus. Whiteside had a role with that office, which allowed him to use the attorney's control number. Jurors saw messages confirming Whiteside's direct control of Hillard Abroms control number.

The records showed that Alexander paid Whiteside $8,000 in August of 2022, and days later, a packet with an Abroms Law Office attorney control number was delivered to Alexander in the prison.

In a different delivery, a $3,000 payment from Alexander to Whiteside was followed by the organization delivering drug-soaked paper to Whiteside, and Whiteside utilizing the Hillard Abroms Law Office control number to send documents into the prison.

In the 90 days following the August delivery, Alexander's operation laundered $30,000 in profits.

Intelligence Analyst Sands discovered hundreds of thousands of dollars that were the profits of drug sales by Alexander's operation. More than $218,000 of laundered drug money was tracked through conspirator Jessica Queen alone.

Finally, Alexander was then caught in prison with his legal documents, soaked in drugs.

During the trial, jurors learned of the different ways the conspirators communicated and how Alexander "structured" his organization. Alexander managed his organization so that different participants were insulated from one another. This strategy made it so that individual participants in the organization had "plausible deniability" as to what they were doing, who they were working with, and why they were doing the things they did. In many cases, key players in the conspiracy did not even know that other key players were involved.

This structuring process attempts to ensure that even if one scheme or participant is caught by law enforcement, the entire operation survives.

Jurors were not swayed by the arguments of L. Toure McCord, an attorney from Columbus, that Whiteside was an innocent participant the situation. The Defense claimed that Whiteside had accepted the $11,000 in payments directly to his personal accounts, but was intent on paying Attorney Hillard Abroms of Columbus the money in exchange for Alexander's legal representation.

For additional information about the case, APA Litle's Opening Statement is available in audio format at the bottom of this release.

The Prosecution:

The Prosecution of Justin Alexander and Norman Whiteside was a monumental undertaking, involving years of investigation and two years of court litigation, concluding with a trial with over 700 exhibits and nearly 40 witnesses, some of whom were flown in from as far away as Boston and Denver.

Every co-defendant that was charged in Justin Alexander's drug-smuggling operation has now been convicted of a felony offense.

Co-defendants Include:

Jessica Queen, 45, of Belpre, Ohio. One of Alexander's many, simultaneous girlfriends who was used to direct the organization outside of prison. Queen faces sentencing at a later date.

Lisa Davis, 48, of Zanesville, Alexander's sister. Davis is serving four years in prison for money laundering and received Alexander's profits.

Tondalea Hale, 52, of Zanesville, Alexander's cousin. Tondelea Hale was recruited into Alexander's operation by Lisa Davis, and she was convinced to hold, transfer, and manage the organization's money at the direction of Alexander. Hale had never even seen Alexander face-to-face. She faces sentencing at a later date.

Jolene Savage, 29, of Columbus, mother to one of Alexander's children. Savage performed numerous duties for the Alexander organization, including several smuggling attempts. She will be sentenced on a Bill of Information at a later date.

Jamuall Jones, 26, of Warren Correctional Institution, from Cleveland. Jones was Alexander's roommate and one of his distributors. Jones was previously sentenced.

Heaven Goudlock, 24, of Cleveland. Goudlock was Jones's girlfriend and moved money for the organization. She was previously sentenced.

Sasha Hill, 24, of Cleveland. Hill was Jones's friend and agreed to move money for the Alexander organization.

She faces sentencing at a future date.

Kyle “White Boy” Ross, 32, of Ross Correctional Institution, from Marion. Ross was one of Alexander’s captains, and a high-level drug distributor for Alexander. He was previously sentenced.

Randall “Bub” Cremeans, 38, of Lebanon Correctional Institution, from Zanesville. Cremeans was Ross’s roommate and a distributor for the organization. He was previously sentenced.

Kristen Sonagere, 31, of Dayton. Sonagere was Cremeans friend and moved money for the Alexander organization for both Ross and Cremeans. She faces sentencing at a later date.

Ken O. “Lil man” Gatlin, 27, of Zanesville. Gatlin was one of Alexander’s captains, responsible for drug distribution in his side of a housing unit at Ross Correctional Institution. He was previously sentenced.

Vanita McCrae, 40, of Zanesville. Gatlin’s sister, McCrae moved thousands of dollars for the criminal enterprise. She was previously sentenced.

Kashawn “Duda” Cox, 26, of Zanesville. Duda was another of Alexander’s captains, responsible for drug distribution in the opposite housing unit at Ross Correctional Institution. He was previously sentenced.

Emily Goodrich, 26, of Zanesville, Cox’s ex-girlfriend. She moved money for the organization between Cox and Alexander. She was previously sentenced.

Michelle Lang, 26, of Zanesville, Cox’s girlfriend. Lang moved money for the organization and was also previously sentenced.

The jury in this case faced a difficult task. The complexity of the criminal scheme, the number of witnesses called to testify, and the number of exhibits required them to be fully focused. At the end of the case, they delivered the correct verdict. Jurors were shocked to learn of things that are both permitted in prison, as well as things occurring in violation of prison rules.

Both Whiteside and Alexander have been convicted of separate previous homicides. Whiteside purchased guns used in a gangland shooting of Dennison University student Laura Carter who was driving through Columbus with her parents when stray gunfire took her life.

Alexander was previously convicted for killing Jason Hunter in a Vine Street shooting in 2000. He is currently serving 25 years for home-invasions he committed after being released from prison for that homicide.

At sentencing, the State will be requesting maximum consecutive sentences for both murderers. For Whiteside that number is twenty-one and one-half years in prison, for Alexander that number is likely 149 years in prison.