



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **PASSAIC MAN INDICTED ON MULTIPLE COUNTS OF SEXUAL OFFENSES AGAINST A CHILD AND CONSPIRING WITH A GARFIELD WOMAN TO TAMPER WITH AND BRIBE WITNESSES**

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PATERSON, NEW JERSEY:

October 27, 2021

Passaic County Prosecutor Camelia M. Valdes announces that Sergio Bernal, age 33, of Passaic, New Jersey, and Maricella Gonzalez, age 52, of Garfield, New Jersey, have been indicted. Bernal has been indicted on multiple counts of sexual offenses against a child, hindering apprehension, terroristic threats, witness tampering, conspiracy to commit witness tampering, bribery, conspiracy to commit bribery, tampering with physical evidence, and contempt. Gonzalez has been indicted on witness tampering, conspiracy to commit witness tampering, bribery, conspiracy to commit bribery, and tampering with physical evidence.

A Passaic County Grand Jury has returned Indictment No. 21-10-00692-I, charging Sergio Bernal with various sexual offenses against a child that took place at multiple residences in Passaic from October 2013 to August 2020. Mr. Bernal was indicted on three counts of first degree Aggravated Sexual Assault, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2a(1), three counts of first degree Aggravated Sexual Assault, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2a(2)(c), three counts of second degree Sexual Assault, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2b, three counts of second degree Sexual Assault, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2c(1), seven counts of second degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4a(1), one count of third degree Aggravated Criminal Sexual Contact, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-3a, one count of fourth degree Criminal Sexual Contact, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-3b, one count of second degree Hindering Apprehension or Prosecution, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:29-3b(3), and one count of third degree Terroristic Threats, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:12-3a.

Indictment No. 21-10-00692-I also charges Mr. Bernal with various offenses related to a conspiracy arising out of the City of Paterson to tamper with and bribe witnesses, and also contacting those same witnesses in violation of a no-contact order issued against him by a Passaic County Judge. Mr. Bernal was indicted on two counts of third degree Witness Tampering, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), two counts of third degree Conspiracy to Commit Witness Tampering, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:5-2a(1) and N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), two counts of second degree Bribery of a Witness, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5d, two counts of second degree Conspiracy to Commit Bribery of a Witness, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:5-2a(1)

and N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), three counts of fourth degree Contempt, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:29-9a, and one count of fourth degree Tampering with Physical Evidence, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-6(1).

Indictment No. 21-10-00692-I also charges Maricella Gonzalez with conspiring with Mr. Bernal to tamper with and bribe witnesses. Ms. Gonzalez was indicted on two counts of third degree Witness Tampering, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), two counts of third degree Conspiracy to Commit Witness Tampering, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:5-2a(1) and N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), two counts of second degree Bribery of a Witness, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5d, two counts of second degree Conspiracy to Commit Bribery of a Witness, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:5-2a(1) and N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), and one count of fourth degree Tampering with Physical Evidence, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-6(1).

After Mr. Bernal was arrested for and charged with various sexual offenses against a child that took place at multiple residences in Passaic from October 2013 to August 2020, Mr. Bernal and Ms. Gonzalez conspired to tamper with and bribe the child victim and another witness in connection to the prosecution against Mr. Bernal. Specifically, Mr. Bernal and Ms. Gonzalez offered a sum of United States currency and financial assistance with tuition and a car to the child victim and another witness in exchange for recanting their statements to law enforcement regarding the sexual assault charges pending against Mr. Bernal.

The sentencing exposure on first degree Aggravated Sexual Assault where the victim is under the age of thirteen is twenty five years to life in New Jersey State Prison, subject to a twenty five year parole disqualifier pursuant to the Jessica Lunsford Act; on first degree Aggravated Sexual Assault, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2a(2)(c), it is ten to twenty years in New Jersey State Prison, with 85% of the term to be served before parole eligibility pursuant to the No Early Release Act; on second degree Sexual Assault, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2b, it is five to ten years in New Jersey State Prison with 85% of the term to be served before parole eligibility pursuant to the No Early Release Act; on second degree Sexual Assault, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-2c(1), it is five to ten years in New Jersey State Prison with 85% of the term to be served before parole eligibility pursuant to the No Early Release Act; on second degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4a(1), it is five to ten years in New Jersey State Prison; on third degree Aggravated Criminal Sexual Contact, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-3a, it is three to five years in New Jersey State Prison; on fourth degree Criminal Sexual Contact, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:14-3b, it is up to eighteen months New Jersey State Prison; on second degree Hindering Apprehension or Prosecution, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:29-3b(3), it is five to ten years in New Jersey State Prison; on third degree Terroristic Threats, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:12-3a, it is three to five years in New Jersey State Prison; on third degree Witness Tampering, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), it is three to five years in New Jersey State Prison; on third degree Conspiracy to Commit Witness Tampering, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:5-2a(1) and N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), it is three to five years in New Jersey State Prison; on second degree Bribery of a Witness, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5d, it is five to ten years in New Jersey State Prison; on second degree Conspiracy to Commit Bribery of a Witness, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:5-2a(1) and N.J.S.A. 2C:28-5a(1), it is five to ten years in New Jersey State Prison; on fourth degree Contempt, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:29-9a, it is up to 18 months in New Jersey State Prison; and, on fourth degree Tampering with Physical Evidence, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:28-6(1), it is up to 18 months in New Jersey State Prison.

If convicted, Mr. Bernal is subject to Parole Supervision for Life and Megan's Law registration requirements. Mr. Bernal is an inmate at the Passaic County Jail and will remain detained pending trial.

Ms. Gonzalez is presently detained at the Passaic County Jail. The Passaic County Prosecutor's Office has filed a motion for pretrial detention, which will be heard before a Superior Court Judge at a later date.

A criminal indictment is merely an accusation. Despite this accusation, defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

The Passaic County Prosecutor's Office asks anyone with additional information about this incident to contact us on our tips line at 1-877-370-PCPO or [tips@passaiccountynj.org](mailto:tips@passaiccountynj.org).

For media inquiries concerning this case, contact Assistant Prosecutor Alyssa DiSturco of the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office Special Victims Unit at [adisturco@passaiccountynj.org](mailto:adisturco@passaiccountynj.org) or at (862) 289-2106.



**Sergio Bernal**



**Maricella Gonzalez**