



# NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

**SAYLER A. FLEMING**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## *Judge sentences fentanyl dealer who caused overdose death to life in federal prison*

ST. LOUIS –Gerald E. Cardwell, Jr., 50, of O’Fallon, Missouri was sentenced today to life imprisonment for Distribution of a Controlled Substance (Fentanyl) Resulting in Death. Cardwell was convicted by a jury in November 2021 of distributing fentanyl to Ryan Leahy, also of O’Fallon, in July 2019. Leahy was found deceased in a room at the Hollywood Casino Hotel.

Evidence presented at trial revealed that Leahy had picked Cardwell up from the Hollywood Casino Hotel on the night of July 25, 2019. In the early morning hours of July 26, 2019, Cardwell gave Leahy a mixture of fentanyl and Adderall, sending text messages to a third-party witness that Leahy was unconscious in the car. Surveillance video obtained from Hollywood Casino Hotel depicted Cardwell, Leahy, and the witness enter the hotel shortly before 2 a.m. The third party left approximately ten minutes later, leaving Cardwell and Leahy in the hotel room. Cardwell departed at 10:00 the following morning. Housekeeping staff found Leahy deceased in the room at approximately 3:15 that afternoon. The St. Louis County Medical Examiner’s Office determined that Leahy died of fentanyl and ethanol intoxication. However, two experts testified that the Leahy’s blood alcohol content at the time of his death was .03. According to the Medical Examiner, that small amount of alcohol could not have caused Leahy’s death.

United States District Judge John A. Ross called the evidence against Cardwell “overwhelming,” and described his conduct as “unconscionable.” Judge Ross specifically noted that Leahy was either dying or already dead at the time Cardwell left the hotel room without summoning help, leading him to question Cardwell as to how he could have abandoned Leahy, who Cardwell had known for years. Cardwell, who refused to make a statement, did not respond. Judge Ross also wondered aloud how Cardwell could continue to sell fentanyl after Leahy’s death, evidence of which was presented at trial.

Judge Ross specifically commended the efforts of Detective Sergeant Kendra House and the entire Maryland Heights Police Department, commenting that law enforcement could have simply dismissed Leahy’s death without investigating it. Instead, Judge Ross noted, the Maryland Heights Police worked diligently to determine who was responsible for providing fentanyl to Leahy and that Cardwell was properly held accountable.

“The sentence imposed today on Mr. Cardwell should serve as a clear message. The death and destruction caused by individuals distributing fentanyl has no limits and must be punished

accordingly,” stated United States Attorney Saylor Fleming. “The outstanding investigative efforts of the Maryland Heights Police Department was a large part of the success of this prosecution. I hope the life sentence received by Mr. Cardwell provides some solace to the Leahy family.”

“Opioid addiction and related overdose deaths are a tragedy that impacts all communities, and all levels of society. Our police department takes these cases very seriously and we do everything we can to identify the persons responsible and hold them accountable,” stated Chief Bill Carson. “The detectives involved in this case, Sgt. Kendra House and Cpl. Nick Anthon, put a tremendous amount of work into this investigation. We value the relationship that we have with the U.S. Attorney’s Office, and we very much appreciate their willingness to prosecute these cases”.

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This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Missouri, is available on-line at

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