

# Polk County Attorney's Office

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## PRESS RELEASE

**March 31, 2017**

On March 29, 2017, the Grand Forks Police Department in North Dakota, in conjunction with the Grand Forks Narcotics Task Force (GFNTF) and the Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force (PTPDTF) in Minnesota, issued a public safety announcement regarding small blue pills stamped with "A 215" which were believed to be laced with fentanyl. A copy of that press release is attached.

Based upon the investigations of the involved law enforcement agencies, a number of individuals were arrested in Minnesota. Those individuals include: Cody Allen Stengl, age 19, of East Grand Forks, Minnesota; Robert John Benson Powell, age 20, of East Grand Forks, Minnesota; Benjamin David Gottberg, age 19, of East Grand Forks, Minnesota; Joel Anthony Ryan, age 22, of East Grand Forks, Minnesota; and Leah Anne Sourdif, age 20, of Grand Forks, North Dakota.

What follows in this release is the probable cause portion of the criminal complaints filed by the Polk County Attorney's Office against each of the above-named individuals:

On March 22, 2017, officers and emergency personnel responded to a call for medical assistance at 424 8th Avenue South, Grand Forks, North Dakota, based upon a report that a male appeared to unresponsive and not breathing. After the male was revived, he stated that he had snorted a blue powder, which may have contained fentanyl. On March 24, 2017, the male stated that he crushed up a blue pill with the imprint "A 215" on it; he thought the pill contained oxycodone; he had heard that people were selling fake oxycodone pills, which actually contained fentanyl; and that was why he told paramedics he thought he had ingested fentanyl.

On March 26, 2017, the Orange County, New Jersey, Sheriff's Office issued a bulletin regarding an unattended death investigation. Officers found a blue pill, which was physically identified as oxycodone with the imprint "A 215" on it, but a laboratory analysis of the pill indicated that it contained furanyl fentanyl. Officers were advised to use caution when handling these pills due to the dangerous nature of fentanyl. (Your complainant knows that fentanyl is an extremely dangerous opiate narcotic listed in Schedule II of Minn. Stat. 152.02, subd. 3(c)(10), and that numerous individuals have overdosed, and several have died, in the Red River Valley, including Polk County, in the past few years due to the ingestion of fentanyl on its own or in combination with other illegal drugs, such as heroin.)

On March 28, 2017, [East Grand Forks Police Department (EGFPD)] Tyler Hajicek was on routine patrol when he saw a red Chevrolet Corsica, bearing Minnesota license plate number 980UHU, parked on the side of the road in the 200 block of 8th Avenue NW in East Grand Forks, Polk County, Minnesota. Officer Hajicek knew that this car belonged to Joel Anthony

Ryan, and he recently had received information that Joel Anthony Ryan was using illegal drugs. Officer Hajicek saw two people inside of the car. [A PTPDTF Agent] and EGFPD Officer Jason Schnathorst arrived on the scene to assist, and [the PTPDTF Agent] noted that the driver appeared to be passed out and was slumped over the center console. Officer Schnathorst then approached the car and noted that the driver still was slumped over. Officer Schnathorst spoke to the driver, who was identified as Joel Anthony Ryan (whose date of birth was May 25, 1994), and the passenger, who was identified as Leah Anne Sourdif (whose date of birth was July 2, 1996). (The officers were notified that Joel Anthony Ryan was on probation at that time for a gross misdemeanor Financial Transaction Card Fraud conviction in Polk County District Court File No. 60-CR-15-757, that he was subject to testing and searches as a condition of his probation in that case, and that there was an order, dated December 16, 2016, which prohibited him from having any contact with Leah Sourdif issued in Grand Forks County District Court File No. 18-2016-CR-2544 in which he was charged with felony Aggravated Assault - Domestic Violence.) [The PTPDTF Agent] noted that Joel Anthony Ryan's face was covered with open sores, that his speech was slurred, that he was very fidgety, and that he was hesitant in answering Officer Schnathorst's questions. [The PTPDTF Agent] also saw what appeared to be a syringe cap in plain view inside of the driver's side door. [The PTPDTF Agent] asked Joel Anthony Ryan to exit the car, and after he did so, Joel Anthony Ryan kept digging in his pockets. [The PTPDTF Agent] then asked Joel Anthony Ryan to empty his pockets. When he did so, [the PTPDTF Agent] saw a pen tube with burnt residue on it, a piece of tinfoil, and folded up pieces of paper with something inside of them. [The PTPDTF Agent] asked Joel Anthony Ryan what was in the folded up paper. Joel Anthony Ryan stated that he thought it was sugar; he was supposed to have gotten some heroin; but he got ripped off. [The PTPDTF Agent] then looked inside of Joel Anthony Ryan's wallet and saw another folded up piece of tinfoil with something inside of it. [The PTPDTF Agent] asked if there was heroin in the tinfoil. Joel Anthony Ryan stated that it was not heroin but instead was two pills; he did not know what the pills were; he got the pills from a friend, whom he thought got the pills off the internet; the pills were not hydrocodone or oxycodone but were something different; and he was not sure if the pills contained fentanyl or not. [The PTPDTF Agent] noted that the two pills were blue and had the imprint "A 215" on them. Officer Schnathorst then transported Joel Anthony Ryan to the EGFPD.

Officer Hajicek spoke to Leah Anne Sourdif. Leah Anne Sourdif stated that she was Joel Anthony Ryan's girlfriend and was pregnant with his child; Joel Anthony Ryan was on a "bender" and looked awful; they both recently got out of treatment; they both had relapsed; things were not going well for them; there was drug paraphernalia in the car; and she thought Joel Anthony Ryan placed some illegal items in her purse. Officer Hajicek asked if there was anything that would stick or poke him in the purse, and Leah Anne Sourdif pointed to the outside pocket. Officer Hajicek then discovered a syringe and a pipe in the outside pocket of her purse. (Officer Hajicek later conducted a field-test on a portion of the substance in the pipe, and this test was positive for the presence of methamphetamine.) Officer Hajicek then transported Leah Anne Sourdif to the EGFPD.

While at the EGFPD, Leah Anne Sourdif stated that she had six or seven pills in her bra and that she thought the pills contained oxycodone. Leah Anne Sourdif then was searched by a female EGFPD employee. In addition to the seven pills, which were blue and had the imprint "A 215" on them, a small plastic baggie containing a blue powder was found on Leah Anne Sourdif.

While at the EGFPD, [the PTPDTF Agent] interviewed Joel Anthony Ryan. After being advised of his rights, Joel Anthony Ryan stated that he received the pills from a guy named "Tucker" in Grand Forks; he received 20 pills from "Tucker" the day before in Grand Forks; he paid "Tucker" \$200 for 10 of the pills and was "fronted" (sold on credit) the other 10 pills; he snorted some methamphetamine earlier that morning; and he got ripped off when he tried to purchase some heroin. Joel Anthony Ryan also agreed to and did provide a urine sample. (An on-site test conducted on this urine sample was positive for the presence of opiates, methamphetamine, benzodiazepines, and MDMA.) [The PTPDTF Agent] was able to identify "Tucker" as Tucker Christian Collings (whose date of birth was May 8, 1997).

While at the EGFPD, [a PTPDTF Agent] interviewed Leah Anne Sourdif. After being advised of her rights, Leah Anne Sourdif stated that she started using heroin during 2014; she had been in treatment for seven and one-half weeks and stayed clean for a while; she started using again when she returned to Grand Forks; she used one of the blue pills the night before and one-half of a blue pills during the middle of the night; she snorted and smoked the pills; she got sick after the first pill and did not think that was a normal reaction for oxycodone; she also used some methamphetamine that morning; Joel Anthony Ryan received the pills from "Tucker" in Grand Forks; she loaned \$200 to Joel Anthony Ryan to purchase the pills; Joel Anthony Ryan was expecting to receive only 10 pills, but "Tucker" gave him 20 pills; "Tucker" told Joel Anthony Ryan to sell the pills and make a profit, but "Tucker" expected to receive another \$200; the initial 10 pills were supposed to be hers, but Joel Anthony Ryan planned to sell his 10 pills; they went to a party in Grand Forks, and a girl used one of Joel Anthony Ryan's blue pills; the two pills that Joel Anthony Ryan had on him were what he had left after selling, giving away, or using the rest of them; and being pregnant was not enough to motivate her to stay clean. Leah Anne Sourdif also agreed to and did provide a urine sample. Leah Anne Sourdif also was shown a six-person photo array, and she was "fairly certain" that a photograph of Tucker Christian Collings was the person who supplied the blue pills to Joel Anthony Ryan.

[The PTPDTF Agent] then participated in the execution of a search warrant at Tucker Christian Collings' residence, 1925 29th Avenue South in Grand Forks, and Tucker Christian Collings was home at that time. Pursuant to the search warrant, the officers discovered 160 blue pills bearing the imprint "A 215." [The PTPDTF Agent] also interviewed Tucker Christian Collings. After being advised of his rights, Tucker Christian Collings stated that Cody Allen Stengl brought 200 of the pills to his apartment in Grand Forks two to three days before; he owed Cody Allen Stengl \$3,100 for the pills; Cody Allen Stengl told him that he was coming from his (Cody Allen Stengl's) residence before he delivered the pills; and they were friends from high school. Tucker Christian Collings identified a photograph of Cody Allen Stengl (whose date of birth was July 24, 1997) and identified the residence where Cody Allen Stengl lived with his parents in East Grand Forks. Tucker Christian Collings, with the assistance of an officer, sent messages to Cody Allen Stengl on Snapchat stating that he (Tucker Christian Collings) wanted more pills and had money; the response was, "You out?"; Tucker Christian Collings responded that they "went like hotcakes"; and the response was that he was at Benn Gottberg's house but would meet in 25 minutes.

[A] North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NDBCI) Special Agent . . . saw a white pickup truck, which matched the description of the vehicle Tucker Christian Collings stated

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Cody Allen Stengl drove, at Benjamin David Gottberg's residence, 2125 11th Avenue NW in East Grand Forks. After the pickup truck left the residence, EGFPD Officer Greg Gahlon stopped the pickup truck and identified the driver as Cody Allen Stengl. Officer Gahlon then transported Cody Allen Stengl to the EGFPD.

While at the EGFPD, [a PTPDTF Agent] interviewed Cody Allen Stengl. After being advised of his rights, Cody Allen Stengl stated that he knew nothing about any blue pills; he only smoked marijuana; and he lived at home with his parents. After being confronted with the fact that the officers had communicated with him through Snapshot, Cody Allen Stengl refused to cooperate any further.

[The PTPDTF Agent] then obtained a warrant to search Cody Allen Stengl's residence, 18382 440th Avenue SW in East Grand Forks. Pursuant to the search warrant, the officers discovered the following items in Cody Allen Stengl's bedroom: a backpack full of suspected marijuana; some suspected hallucinogenic mushrooms; some pills in a prescription bottle which did not match the description on the bottle; and a ziplock baggie containing 20 designed baggies with 10 blue pills bearing the imprint "A 215" in each of the 20 baggies (200 pills in total). [The PTPDTF Agent] noted that these blue pills appeared to be identical to the pills seized from Tucker Christian Collings' apartment. (The suspected marijuana later was weighed, and it weighed approximately 2,191 grams (or approximately 4.3 pounds) with the packaging. There were no tax stamps affixed to any of the suspected marijuana. A portion of the suspected hallucinogenic mushrooms also was field-tested, and this test was positive for the presence for psilocyn.)

EGFPD Officer Gilbert Tevino stopped a car after it left Benjamin David Gottberg's residence, 2125 11th Avenue NW in East Grand Forks. The driver was identified as Robert John Benson Powell (whose date of birth was December 31, 1996), and the passengers were identified as Benjamin David Gottberg (whose date of birth was June 21, 1997) and [E.D.]. All of them were transported to the EGFPD.

While at the EGFPD, [a PTPDTF Agent] interviewed Robert John Benson Powell. After being advised of his rights, Robert John Benson Powell initially stated that did not know who Cody Allen Stengl was or anything about blue pills. However, Robert John Benson Powell later stated that he thought someone had ordered 500 to 800 pills, but he did not know who it was; he thought 30 to 40 of the pills still were at Benjamin David Gottberg's residence; he knew that Benjamin David Gottberg was friends with Tucker Christian Collings and Cody Allen Stengl, whom he knew sold pills; he arranged deals with two people in Grand Forks and delivered 10 pills to one person and five pills to another person in Grand Forks; he got the pills from Tucker Christian Collings; the pills were selling for \$25 to \$30 each pending upon who the buyer was; the pills were packaged in small red designer baggies; and he did not have a prescription for benzodiazepines. Robert John Benson Powell also agreed to and did provide a urine sample. (An on-site test conducted on this urine sample was positive for the presence of THC (marijuana) and benzodiazepines.)

While at the EGFPD, [the PTPDTF Agent] also interviewed Benjamin David Gottberg. After being advised of his rights, Benjamin David Gottberg stated that he had some pills in a lock box in his vehicle that "a friend" asked him to hold onto; he refused to identify this person; and he

also had an SKS rifle at his residence. Benjamin David Gottberg also agreed to and did provide a urine sample. (An on-site test conducted on this urine sample was positive for the presence of opiates and benzodiazepines.) Benjamin David Gottberg also consented to a search of his vehicle and his residence.

[The PTPDTF Agent] then located a safe in the back of Benjamin David Gottberg's vehicle, which was parked at Benjamin David Gottberg's residence. [The PTPDTF Agent] was able to open the safe with a key that had been seized from Benjamin David Gottberg earlier, and he discovered the following items inside of the safe: 100 blue pills bearing the imprint "A 215" in a designer baggie; two of the same pills inside of another designer baggie; some suspected marijuana; and some marijuana paraphernalia. [The PTPDTF Agent] also searched Benjamin David Gottberg's residence and discovered the following items: an SKS rifle, magazine, and ammunition; marijuana paraphernalia; and some empty designer baggies. (The suspected marijuana later was weighed, and it weighed approximately 36 grams with the packaging.) [The PTPDTF Agent] noted that the residence was almost empty and was for sale at that time and that there were boxes packed with belongings ready to be moved out, and [the PTPDTF Agent] knew that Benjamin David Gottberg's parents were living in Memphis, Tennessee.

On March 29, 2017, [a PTPDTF Agent] interviewed Robert John Benson Powell again. After being advised of his rights again, Robert John Benson Powell stated that he thought the pills came in around two weeks before; he thought there were 500 to 800 pills; he thought Cody Allen Stengl and Tucker Christian Collings had most of the pills; the pills were selling for \$20 to \$40 per pill; and he sold some of the pills to two individuals at Benjamin David Gottberg's residence in East Grand Forks.

[The PTPDTF Agent] then interviewed Benjamin David Gottberg again. Benjamin David Gottberg stated that the blue pills in his safe came from Tucker Christian Collings; he got the pills from Tucker Christian Collings at Tucker Christian Collings' apartment in Grand Forks on Monday evening (March 27, 2017); Tucker Christian Collings wanted him to hold onto the pills for him (Tucker Christian Collings); and he did not know for sure where the pills came from.

Due to the extremely hazardous nature of fentanyl, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (MBCA) Forensic Science Laboratory agreed to conduct an emergency analysis of the pills that were seized as part of this investigation. According to the MBCA Forensic Science Laboratory, an analysis of one of the blue pills bearing the imprint "A 215" seized Joel Anthony Ryan, from Leah Anne Sourdif, from Benjamin David Gottberg's safe, and from Casey Allen Stengl's room indicated the presence of fentanyl and that each pill weighed approximately .1 gram.

Each of these defendants appeared in Polk County District Court on March 30, 2017, at which time bond in varying amounts was set by the district court. All of the defendants currently are set for further hearings in Polk County District Court on April 4, 2017.

As part of this investigation, Tucker Christian Collings, age 19, of Grand Forks, North Dakota, also was arrested, and he is facing criminal charges with respect to this matter in that jurisdiction.

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This matter continues to be an ongoing investigation. In light of this, and in an effort to protect each defendant's right to a fair trial, the Polk County Attorney's Office and law enforcement will not be making further public comments about these cases.

**Because of the positive identification of the presence of fentanyl, the Polk County Attorney's Office and the involved law enforcement agencies continue to warn the public about the extreme dangerousness of these pills.**

**We continue to urge all citizens, especially parents, to be vigilant about the activities of their children, friends, and neighbors and watch for any unusual behaviors or suspicious substances or pills which may be linked to the pills involved in this case. Please contact your local law enforcement agency immediately if you believe you have any information about this case or if you believe you know of the existence of any unexplained blue pills similar to those described in this press release.**