



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
DISTRICT *of* NEW JERSEY

[U.S. Attorneys](#) » [District of New Jersey](#) » [News](#)

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of New Jersey

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Two Customs And Border Protection Officers Indicted, Another Pleads Guilty To Assaults On Fellow Officers At Newark Airport

NEWARK, N.J. – Two Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers were indicted and another pleaded guilty for their roles in the assaults of two fellow CBP officers at Newark Liberty International Airport, U.S. Attorney Craig Carpenito announced today.

Parmenio I. Perez, 40, of Hawthorne, New Jersey, and Michael A. Papagni, 32, of Staten Island, New York, were charged by indictment today with two counts of forcibly assaulting, impeding, intimidating, and interfering with two CBP officers, identified in court documents as "Victim One" and "Victim Two," while the victims were engaged in their duties as CBP officers. They will be arraigned at a later date.

Tito Catota, 38, of Lyndhurst, New Jersey, pleaded guilty June 4, 2018, before Senior U.S. District Judge Katharine S. Hayden in Newark federal court to an information charging him with two counts of forcibly assaulting, impeding, intimidating, and interfering with Victim One and Victim Two while they were engaged in their duties as CBP officers. All three defendants were originally arrested and charged by complaint in September 2017.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

Catota, Perez, and Papagni were employed as CBP officers at Newark Liberty International Airport and were assigned to the Passenger Enforcement Rover Team (PERT). PERT was a CBP specialized unit that identified and intercepted passengers attempting to bring contraband into the United States or who might be associated with terrorist activities. PERT maintained an office on the second floor of Terminal C at Newark Liberty International Airport.

Victim One was assigned to PERT in October 2016. Within the first two weeks that Victim One worked in PERT, Papagni allegedly advised Victim One that the PERT office table was known as the “rape table” and threatened the victim that he would get him on it.

On Jan. 10, 2017, an individual identified in court documents as “CBPO 2” shut off the lights in the PERT office. Papagni, Catota, and another officer identified as “CBPO 3” grabbed Victim One’s arms and legs and threw him on top of the PERT office table. While Papagni, Catota, and CBPO 3 held him down, Perez got on top of Victim One’s mid-section and grinded his body up and down against Victim One’s genitals through the victim’s clothing in a motion simulating a sex act. Victim One unsuccessfully attempted to push Perez off his body. When Perez got off of Victim One, Papagni, Catota, and CBPO 3 released him.

On Nov. 30, 2016, Victim Two, who was assigned to the Port Director staff, went to the PERT office to speak to CBPO 1. A few minutes later, an officer identified as “CBPO 4” locked one of the doors to the office. Catota, Papagni, and Perez then grabbed Victim Two and threw him on his side on the PERT office table. Perez then allegedly simulated a sex act on Victim 2’s leg. Victim Two struggled to get free until Catota, Papagni, and Perez eventually released him.

At his plea hearing, Catota admitted that he and other CBP officers referred to the tables in the PERT office as the “rape table.” Catota also admitted helping grab Victim One and Victim Two, throwing them on the tables, and holding them down while they were attacked. In addition, Catota also admitted that he and other CBP officers discussed the assaults on the Whatsapp chat message service. For instance, on Dec. 7, 2016, Catota stated that another CBP officer had “walked out on the rape” when referring to the assault of Victim Two.

The charges against Perez, Papagni, and Catota each carry a maximum potential penalty of eight years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The charges and allegations against Perez and Papagni are merely accusations, and they are considered innocent unless and until proven guilty.

U.S. Attorney Carpenito credited special agents with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, New York Resident Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Mark Tasky and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Office of Professional Responsibility, New York Resident Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Vance Kuhner, with the investigation leading to the indictment and guilty plea.

The government is represented by Senior Litigation Counsel Leslie Faye Schwartz of the U.S. Attorney’s Office’s Special Prosecutions Division, and Rahul Agarwal, Deputy Chief of the Criminal Division in Newark.

Catota: Alan Zegas Esq., Chatham, New Jersey
Papagni: Chad Seigel Esq., New York
Perez: Lorraine Gauli-Rufo, Verona, New Jersey

Attachment(s):

[Download catota.information.pdf](#)

[Download perez.papagni.indictment.pdf](#)

Topic(s):

Public Corruption

Component(s):

USAO - New Jersey

Press Release Number:

18-202

Updated June 5, 2018