

## Kit Lee Karjala Charged with Smuggling Drugs into Anchorage Jail



**Summary:** *Alaskan attorney Kit Lee Karjala faces federal charges for sneaking drugs into her client at an Anchorage attorney.*

Defense attorney Kit Lee Karjala, 45, faces federal charges along with her client in a scheme to smuggle drugs into the Anchorage Correctional Complex to be then sold to other inmates. Federal prosecutors charged Karjala and Christopher Brandon Miller, a 33-year-old inmate, with drug conspiracy, providing and possessing contraband in a prison, and distribution of and possession with intent to distribute controlled substances.

The Alaska U.S. attorney's office issued a statement explaining how Karjala, a criminal defense attorney licensed with the Alaska Bar Association for 15 years, entered into a drug delivery system with at least four other inmates since the later part of last year until present. They claim that she used her attorney-client privilege to sneak the drugs into Miller and other inmates that she didn't legally represent. She would block the view of correctional officers and surveillance cameras for the exchange of drugs. The inmate would then carry the drugs "inside his body" into the jail.

The affidavit specifically states that Karjala made "professional visits" with Miller and three other unnamed inmates, two of which she never represented as an attorney. Her attorney privileges allowed for them to meet in a video monitored room with no audio recording.

Anchorage FBI Special Agent Richard Fuller noted in the affidavit about a phone call placed by a man identified as Inmate A to a female "drug supplier." The supplier brought Karjala into a three-way conversation where Karjala asked about "pieces of paper," a common reference for paper strips containing Suboxone, an opioid used to treat heroin addiction.

Karjala visited another inmate she wasn't representing in jail on federal drug charges at least seven times since June 2016. That inmate's bank records show a number of transfers to his account from the accounts of other inmates and a total of \$6,800 in transfers from his account to Karjala and her son. In the surveillance footage on a few occasions, Karjala can be seen exchanging items partially hidden by a stack of papers. The inmates then move around in their chairs, supposedly hiding the items in body cavities.

Jail personnel first took action against Karjala on March 16 by ending a meeting between her and Miller. She was allowed to leave without being questioned but Miller was put through an X-ray and placed on "dry-cell" status, meaning he was closely watched by staff in a camera-equipped cell so they could see if he was carrying any illicit items. Nothing was found on this visit but a later one in May found a "suspicious item" in Miller after Karjala met with him. He was placed in the dry-cell again and told by a DOC employee "to give up."

Eventually, Miller passed paper strips that tested positive for Suboxone. They also found him hiding two small plastic jars in his armpit that tested positive for a "distributable quantity" of heroin.

The FBI and Alaska State Troopers with "significant assistance" from the DOC investigated the case. DOC Commissioner Dean Williams stated that inmates trying to smuggle drugs into jails was a common offense but a case involving an attorney was unusual.

Bar counsel for the Alaska Bar Association Nelson Page said they will be conducting an investigation into the allegations against Karjala. If the allegations are true, she would be violating the Alaska Rules of Professional Conduct and Alaska Bar Rules. Page said, "If there's a serious crime that can result in serious penalties, including disbarment and other things." They are also considering an immediate interim suspension on Karjala to prevent "irreparable harm" to other clients.

Do you think she should lose her law license? Tell us in the comments below.

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