

# Judge sets \$1M bail in 'enormous' drug arrest

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STAFF WRITER

LAWRENCE — A mother of four from Haverhill and a federal prison ex-convict from Methuen were ordered held on high bails yesterday in the bizarre case of \$1 million of cocaine left behind in a rented minivan.

In Lawrence District Court, prosecutors said Nicole Paquette, 30, of 64 5th Ave., Haverhill, had used her credit card seven or eight times over the past few months to rent minivans from a Lawrence car rental agency.

Authorities said the second defendant, Angel Ayala Roque, 44, dropped off a Chrysler minivan at Thrifty Car Rental at 608 S. Union St. Tuesday afternoon. Apparently, he forgot or didn't know about two boxes containing 21 kilograms of cocaine still in the vehicle and found by rental agency employees.

The startling discovery led to their arrests and the search of a second-floor apartment at 50 Glen Ave. in Methuen where Roque lived and where another 30

*"To get 51 kilos off the street in one investigation is enormous."*

Lawrence police Chief John Romero on the 21 kilograms of cocaine forgotten in a minivan and another 30 found in a Methuen home

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## DRUGS: Police not sure where cocaine was from

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kilograms of cocaine and \$123,500 in cash were confiscated Tuesday night.

Authorities said the combined street value of the cocaine exceeded \$3 million and should put at least a temporary dent in the local supply of the drug.

"When you take this much product off the street it has to have an impact," Lawrence police Chief John Romero said yesterday. "Unfortunately, we know there are other people who will step up because of the profit margin."

"To get 51 kilos off the street in one investigation is enormous," Romero said. "This will have a significant short-term impact."

Paquette was arrested at the car rental agency after an officer posing as an employee called her to pick up boxes that had been left behind. She is charged with trafficking cocaine over 100 grams, and conspiracy to violate drug laws. She was held on \$30,000 bail.

After an investigation, Roque, was arrested later in the evening outside the Methuen apartment. Roque, who also gives a Philadelphia address, was charged with trafficking in cocaine over 100 grams, two counts, and conspiracy to violate drug laws. He was held on \$1 million bail.

Prosecutor Jessica Strasnick asked Judge Stephen Ostrach to set \$1 million cash bail for Paquette and \$5 million for Roque.

She said Paquette was currently on probation from Haverhill District Court, and Roque had served six years in a federal prison on drug charges and posed a flight risk if he were to be released.

Defense lawyers Murat Erkan and John Valerio contended Paquette's constitutional rights were violated because when Valerio arrived at the police station and told officers his firm was representing her, police continued interrogating her.

"When Valerio arrived at the police station at 9:40 p.m., he communicated to police that he represented her," Erkan told the court. "The Police Department stalled. He was told they were still in booking when in fact she was undergoing interrogation."



ANGIE BEAULIEU/Staff photos

Angel Ayala Roque talks to his lawyer, John Valerio, during Roque's arraignment on cocaine charges. Authorities say Roque and Nicole Paquette rented a car in Lawrence but left about 21 kilograms of cocaine in it when they returned the vehicle.



Haverhill mother of four Nicole Paquette stands next to her



on \$1 million bail.

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Valerio told Judge Ostrach that if statements by Paquette were to be suppressed, the search warrant, along with the 30 kilograms of cocaine and cash found in the Methuen apartment, could be barred from evidence, he said.

Stephen O'Connell, spokesman for the district attorney's office, declined to comment on the issue raised by the two lawyers. "I'll just let what we said in court stand," O'Connell said.

Erkan said Paquette, who also has an address at 100 Rockingham Park in Derry, N.H., is certified as a rehabilitation assistant and works to support her four children. He asked the court to set \$10,000 cash bail.

"Five million might as well be \$50 million," Valerio told the court in arguing for lower bail for Roque.

He said Roque had no record of failing to appear in court, has part ownership of a local business, a 1½-year-old daughter, has lived in this area for 12 years, and is self-employed and comes from Puerto Rico.



**Haverhill mother of four Nicole Paquette stands next to her lawyer, Murat Erkan, during her arraignment on cocaine charges yesterday.**

Valerio suggested \$50,000 cash bail for Roque.

Ostrach set \$30,000 cash bail for Paquette, and \$1 million cash bail on Roque, \$500,000 on each of the two counts of trafficking cocaine over 100 grams.

He ordered the couple to return to court on Oct. 11 for a probable cause hearing.

Romero said the investigation continues.

He said police did not know where the drugs came from or were going to, but that a seizure that large indicated to him that the drug operation was regional in scope.

He said police would be investigating to determine where Roque and Paquette fit into the operation.

"This wasn't your street-level operation," he said. "The sheer quantity of the drugs seized leads us to believe they were not just for the immediate area."