

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

No. 24-3237

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

PARIS CARTER,
Appellant

On Appeal from the U.S. District Court, W.D. Pa.
Judge Marilyn J. Horan, No. 2:20-cr-00104-001

Before: RESTREPO, FREEMAN, and MASCOTT, *Circuit Judges*
Submitted: Jan. 20, 2026; Filed: Sep. 25, 2026

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION*

RESTREPO, *Circuit Judge*. Paris Carter was convicted of one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and distribution of 400 grams or more of fentanyl and 100 grams or more of a fentanyl analogue under 21 U.S.C. § 846, and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering under 18 U.S.C. § 1956(h). The District Court imposed a prison term of 408 months on the drug count and 240 months on the money laundering count, to run concurrently. Carter challenges the denial of various motions he filed and the procedural reasonableness of his sentence.¹ For the reasons below, we will affirm.

* This is not an opinion of the full Court and, under 3d Cir. I.O.P. 5.7, is not binding precedent.

¹ While Carter’s brief twice describes his sentence as “procedurally and substantively unreasonable,” Appellant Br. 5, 48, Carter raises only procedural challenges to his sentence. Therefore, we review the sentence only for procedural unreasonableness. *See United States v. Dep’t of Ins.*, 66 F.4th 114, 120 n.7 (3d Cir. 2023) (recognizing that an appellant forfeits an argument by failing to raise it in the opening brief).

I.²

Carter challenges the denial of his motion to suppress evidence seized from his electronic devices. We exercise plenary review over the District Court’s review of the magistrate judge’s determination of probable cause. *United States v. Conley*, 4 F.3d 1200, 1204 (3d Cir. 1993). We deferentially review the magistrate judge’s probable cause determination, evaluating only whether the magistrate judge had a substantial basis for finding the affidavit established probable cause to support the search warrant. *United States v. Whitner*, 219 F.3d 289, 296 (3d Cir. 2000).

In December 2018, United States Postal Inspector Lindsay Weckerly submitted to the United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania an affidavit of probable cause (the “Affidavit”) in support of the government’s application for a warrant to search eleven electronic devices belonging to Carter. The devices had been seized in February and March 2018 by the University of California, Los Angeles (“UCLA”) Police Department in connection with California state charges against Carter unrelated to the conduct at issue here. Carter argues that the Affidavit improperly relied on the knowledge of the UCLA Police Department in contravention of the collective knowledge doctrine. Specifically, he contends that the Affidavit did not establish probable cause because the government “had no independent information that evidence of their [Pennsylvania] investigation would be found on those particular devices.” Appellant Br. 33–34.

² The District Court had jurisdiction pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3231. This Court has jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1291 and 18 U.S.C. § 3742(a).

Carter confuses the issue by introducing the collective knowledge doctrine. Under the collective knowledge doctrine, probable cause or reasonable suspicion to support a seizure, search, or arrest may be established by imputing the knowledge of one law enforcement officer to the officer who conducted the seizure, search, or arrest. *United States v. Whitfield*, 634 F.3d 741, 745 (3d Cir. 2010). The doctrine applies, for example, when multiple officers jointly execute a *Terry* stop of an individual but no single officer witnessed or even knew about all the information that, in the aggregate, established reasonable suspicion. *Id.* at 743, 746. We are not faced with such a scenario. As the District Court noted in denying Carter’s motion to suppress, the Affidavit did not rely on the collective knowledge doctrine in support of a finding of probable cause. Rather, the Affidavit’s references to the California investigation merely explained “how the devices were obtained and where they are presently located.” App. 142.

The Affidavit established probable cause to search the devices solely based on the evidence adduced in the Pennsylvania investigation. For example, the Affidavit stated: five packages of fentanyl sent from Hong Kong to Western Pennsylvania were tracked by an IP address linked to Carter’s residence; another package containing fentanyl was addressed to Carter’s grandmother and delivered to a residence in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on Mohler Street—the namesake of the gang of which Carter was a member—by an individual who had tried to deposit cash into Carter’s bank account; 486 grams of fentanyl, a firearm, and drug paraphernalia were recovered from the Mohler Street residence; Carter placed more than \$150,000 in cash into bank accounts and prepaid cards; Carter’s aunt, who had a reported yearly income less than \$12,000, leased luxury automobiles believed to be used

by Carter; and Carter’s social media included pictures of Carter with luxury cars, firearms, and cash, as well as posts that referred to opioid trafficking. This evidence exceeded the minimal “substantial basis” required to conclude that “given all the circumstances set forth in the affidavit . . . there is a fair probability that contraband or evidence of a crime will be found.” *Whitner*, 219 F.3d at 296 (quoting *Illinois v. Gates*, 462 U.S. 213, 238 (1983)). The District Court properly denied the suppression motion.

Carter also appeals the District Court’s denial of his motion for a new trial pursuant to Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 33, contending a new trial or at least a post-trial evidentiary hearing was required to determine Weckerly’s involvement in the California investigation. We review the denial of a Rule 33 motion for a new trial for abuse of discretion. *United States v. Pavulak*, 700 F.3d 651, 671 (3d Cir. 2012).

Under the Jencks Act, 18 U.S.C. § 3500, the government produced Weckerly’s investigative notes, which included “type a search warrant based on their case,” and “PC – sexual assaults” and “dump phone” beneath a heading “Detective Bell,” referring to a detective from the UCLA investigation. App. 715. Carter submits that the notes “raise[d] substantial questions as to the integrity of the evidence or the government’s representations” by demonstrating that the government concealed its reliance on the California case. Appellant Br. 38–39 (citing *United States v. Brink*, 39 F.3d 419, 429 (3d Cir. 1994)).

We agree with the District Court that the communications between Weckerly and California law enforcement did not undermine the search warrant. Carter places import on the line “type a search warrant based on their case,” interpreting that phrase to mean that

Weckerly planned to draft her warrant based on the UCLA investigation. The plain text and context of the note support the more likely interpretation that the UCLA Police Department planned to draft an affidavit for a search warrant in its own case. Even if Weckerly did intend to draft a warrant application based on the UCLA investigation, the District Court did not abuse its discretion in denying Carter’s motion. Law enforcement officials may rely upon information from different law enforcement agencies. *United States v. Yusuf*, 461 F.3d 374, 385 (3d Cir. 2006) (“[I]nformation received from other law enforcement officials during the course of an investigation is generally presumed to be reliable.”). Carter recognizes this, stating that “while evidence may be shared across jurisdictions, any subsequent search still must be justified independently.” Reply Br. 7. As discussed above, the Affidavit does just that by establishing probable cause through evidence from the Pennsylvania investigation.

Therefore, the District Court did not err in either ruling relating to the suppression of evidence derived from the devices.

II.

Carter challenges the District Court’s denial of his motion for a bill of particulars as to the money laundering conspiracy count. A bill of particulars is required if an indictment fails to “adequately apprise the defendant of what he must be prepared to meet,” *United States v. Moyer*, 674 F.3d 192, 203 (3d Cir. 2012), and consequently “significantly impairs the defendant’s ability to prepare his defense or is likely to lead to prejudicial surprise at trial,” *United States v. Urban*, 404 F.3d 754, 772 (3d Cir. 2005) (quoting *United States v. Rosa*, 891 F.2d 1063, 1066 (3d Cir. 1989)). We review the District Court’s denial of a

motion for a bill of particulars for abuse of discretion. *Moyer*, 674 F.3d at 202.

Carter argues that the District Court erred in denying his motion for a bill of particulars because he “lacked sufficient notice [of] what the government’s theory would be at trial.” Appellant Br. 40. An indictment need not, however, present a “fully integrated trial theory for the benefit of the defendants.” *United States v. Addonizio*, 451 F.2d 49, 64 (3d Cir. 1971). The indictment alleged that between June 2017 and February 2018, Carter, his aunt, and other unnamed individuals conspired to conduct financial transactions involving the proceeds of drug trafficking activity, and to conceal and carry out that activity. The indictment specified that Carter instructed his aunt and others to lease or purchase assets, including luxury vehicles, on his behalf; instructed others to make purchases, including cashier’s checks and money orders, in small amounts on his behalf; structured or caused others to structure financial transactions in amounts less than \$10,000 to avoid financial institution reporting requirements; and used the cash proceeds of the drug trafficking activity in transactions exceeding \$10,000. These details were sufficient “to inform the defendant of the nature of the charges brought against him to adequately prepare his defense, to avoid surprise during the trial and to protect him against a second prosecution for an inadequately described offense,” and do not warrant reversing the District Court’s denial. *Id.* at 63–64 (quoting *United States v. Tucker*, 262 F. Supp. 305, 308 (S.D.N.Y. 1966)).

Moreover, where a defendant receives discovery that reveals additional information relating to the alleged deficiencies in an indictment, “access to discovery further weakens the case for a bill of particulars.” *Urban*, 404 F.3d at 772. Here, the government produced

the Affidavit, which provided details regarding the purchase and leasing of high-end cars and financial accounts linked to Carter. This discovery further diminishes any purported need for a bill of particulars.

The District Court did not err in denying Carter's request for a bill of particulars.

III.

Carter argues that the District Court improperly denied Carter's motions in limine and admitted evidence of firearms, large amounts of cash, luxury purchases, and rap lyrics found on Carter's phone, which cumulatively prejudiced Carter and was probative only of the undisputed fact that Carter was a drug dealer.³

We disagree. The evidence was probative of facts in dispute, and the probative value of the evidence was not substantially outweighed by the danger of prejudice. Fed. R. Evid. 403. The District Court did not err in admitting evidence of firearms possession, as evidence relating to firearms is probative of drug conspiracies. *United States v. Womack*, 55 F.4th 219, 235 (3d Cir. 2022) (“[T]he possession of weapons is highly probative of the large scale of a narcotics distribution conspiracy and the type of protection the conspirators felt they needed to protect their operation.” (quoting *United States v. Price*, 13 F.3d 711, 717 (3d Cir. 1994))). Similarly, the court did not abuse its discretion in admitting evidence

³ The government argues that Carter waived this argument because his brief did not reference any specific improper exhibit or improperly-denied objection at trial. We assume, without deciding, that Carter's argument is preserved, so we will consider this challenge under the usual abuse of discretion standard applied to evidentiary rulings. See *United States v. Savage*, 85 F.4th 102, 120 n.17 (3d Cir. 2023).

of Carter’s lavish lifestyle as tending to show that Carter obtained cash through the distribution of drugs and as probative of money laundering. *See United States v. Chandler*, 326 F.3d 210, 215 (3d Cir. 2003) (holding that the court did not abuse its discretion in admitting, as probative of participation in drug distribution conspiracy, evidence of cash purchases coupled with evidence that the defendant had no legitimate source of cash).

Finally, the rap lyrics are sufficiently autobiographical and relevant to the charged conduct to satisfy Federal Rule of Evidence 403. *See United States v. Pierce*, 785 F.3d 832, 841 (2d Cir. 2015) (“Rap lyrics . . . are properly admitted . . . where they are relevant and their probative value is not substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice.”). The lyrics are relevant and probative—they were penned on the Notes application on Carter’s phone during the time of the charged conduct and discuss specific conduct related to the conspiracy in addition to repeated references to cash and drugs. *See United States v. Banks*, 104 F.4th 496, 517 (4th Cir. 2024) (explaining that music lyric evidence “can be relevant if it matches details of the alleged crime” (citation modified)). For example, lyrics written in November 2017 discuss driving a “new Bentayga,” a car the government alleged Carter’s aunt leased on his behalf using profits from drug sales in October 2017, and reference hiding cash from drug sales at his grandmother’s house, which correlates with the allegation that a package of fentanyl was addressed to his grandmother. S. App. 298.

We discern no abuse of discretion in the decision to admit this evidence.

IV.

Carter argues that his sentence is procedurally unreasonable because the District Court failed to meaningfully weigh his upbringing and the unwarranted sentencing

disparity with his co-conspirator Lewis Johnson. We will affirm the sentence and hold that the District Court properly considered Carter’s background circumstances in its sentencing calculation and did not commit plain error by failing to consider his sentencing disparity argument.⁴

A sentence is procedurally reasonable if the District Court: “(1) correctly calculated the defendant’s advisory Guidelines range; (2) appropriately considered any motions for a departure under the Guidelines; and (3) gave meaningful consideration to the sentencing factors set forth in 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a).” *United States v. Freeman*, 763 F.3d 322, 335 (3d Cir. 2014). As relevant here, “[w]hen a defendant alleges procedural error, ‘we must ensure that the district court did not . . . gloss over the § 3553(a) factors.’” *United States v. Jumper*, 74 F.4th 107, 114 (3d Cir. 2023) (quoting *United States v. Brito*, 979 F.3d 185, 189 (3d Cir. 2020)).

⁴ A procedural objection is preserved only if made after the court imposes the sentence. *United States v. Flores-Mejia*, 759 F.3d 253, 255 (3d Cir. 2014) (en banc). At sentencing, Carter’s counsel argued that Carter’s childhood circumstances and the disparity with his co-conspirator’s sentence warranted a downward departure. After announcing its sentence, the District Court asked if there were any reasons why the sentence should not be imposed as stated and counsel for Carter stated: “No, Your Honor. Just based on the mitigating circumstances articulated before.” App. 801. The District Court then asked whether there were objections to the procedural or substantive reasonableness of the sentence, and counsel for Carter responded, “For the record, I’ll just object, your Honor,” to which the court replied, “Understood.” *Id.* While a close call, we hold that this generic objection was not enough to give the District Court “the opportunity to rectify any error by giving meaningful review to the argument” regarding sentencing disparities. *Flores-Mejia*, 759 F.3d at 256. Thus, we review the procedural reasonableness of the sentence for abuse of discretion as to the mitigation argument regarding Carter’s background and for plain error as to the disparities issue. *United States v. Tomko*, 562 F.3d 558, 567 (3d Cir. 2009); *United States v. Olano*, 507 U.S. 725, 734, 736 (1993).

Sentencing courts are bound by this Circuit’s “concrete requirement” to “acknowledge and respond to any properly presented sentencing argument which has colorable legal merit and a factual basis.” *United States v. Ausburn*, 502 F.3d 313, 329 (3d Cir. 2007). Otherwise, the lack of meaningful consideration “renders a sentence procedurally unreasonable which, when appealed, generally requires a remand for resentencing.” *Flores-Mejia*, 759 F.3d at 256.

The record demonstrates the District Court “considered the parties’ arguments and ha[d] a reasoned basis for exercising [its] own legal decisionmaking authority” as to Carter’s history under § 3553(a)(1). *United States v. Begin*, 696 F.3d 405, 411 (3d Cir. 2012) (quoting *United States v. Merced*, 603 F.3d 203, 215–16 (3d Cir. 2010)). At the sentencing hearing, the court stated: “[Y]ou can be assured it has not escaped me the difficulties of how your life began. I am very aware. I have revisited those background circumstances and all that went into your upbringing. That was very difficult for you, and I recognize that.” App. 790. The District Court repeated, “Your difficulties in your early life and the challenges you faced are very much considered by me in my sentencing,” App. 792, and explained such mitigation was outweighed by Carter’s “conscious choices to live a life of hard-core and consistent criminal behavior,” that he “repeated . . . over and over until [he] got caught,” App. 791. The court’s comments at sentencing demonstrated “the exercise of independent judgment” required for a procedurally sound sentence. *United States v. Cora-Alicea*, 100 F.4th 478, 483 (3d Cir. 2024) (quoting *United States v. Grier*,

475 F.3d 556, 571–72 (3d Cir. 2007) (en banc)).⁵

Carter also argues that the District Court failed to meaningfully consider his argument that his sentence should account for a potential disparity with Johnson’s sentence of seventy-two months. Because we are reviewing for plain error, any error must be plain, meaning “clear or obvious, rather than subject to reasonable dispute.” *Puckett v. United States*, 556 U.S. 129, 135 (2009). Our precedent does not support a holding that the District Court’s error, if any, was plain. In *United States v. Parker*, 462 F.3d 273 (3d Cir. 2006), we held that “a defendant cannot rely upon § 3553(a)(6) to seek a reduced sentence designed to lessen disparity between co-defendants’ sentences” because § 3553(a)(6) seeks to “promote national uniformity in sentencing rather than uniformity among co-defendants in the same case.”⁶ *Id.* at 277. In light of *Parker*, Carter cannot establish that the District Court plainly erred by failing to address a disparity between Carter’s and Johnson’s sentences. Therefore, we decline to remand for resentencing.

V.

For the foregoing reasons, we will affirm the District Court’s judgment of conviction and sentence.

⁵ Relatedly, Carter argues that the District Court erred by failing to address U.S.S.G. § 5H1.1, the United States Sentencing Commission’s policy statement—since removed—regarding the impact of development and youth on a sentence. The court’s discussion of Carter’s upbringing adequately demonstrated its consideration of this policy statement. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a)(5)(A) (requiring courts to consider “any pertinent policy statement . . . issued by the Sentencing Commission”).

⁶ Although Carter and Johnson were charged under separate indictments, Carter maintained that “Johnson’s role is effectively . . . one of a co-defendant.” Supp. App. 91.