A prominent New Jersey doctor hired a man to kill his wife after she threatened to expose the illegal prescription drug operation he ran out of his practice with a motorcycle gang, prosecutors said Tuesday.

Dr. James Kauffman, 68, of Linwood, a small town outside Atlantic City, was arrested and charged with first-degree murder more than five years after his wife, local radio host April Kauffman, was found dead inside their home. An alleged co-conspirator, Ferdinand Augello, 61, also faces first-degree murder charges.

The Atlantic County prosecutor’s office, which investigated the case along with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other agencies, said James Kauffman and Augello presided over an illegal opioid network that was run out of Kauffman’s office through an alliance with the Pagan Outlaw Motorcycle Gang.

The killing took place on the morning of May 10, 2012, officials said. A 911 report was made about an unconscious and unresponsive woman at Kauffman’s house around 11:30 a.m. Kauffman told officers who arrived at the house that he found his 47-year-old wife dead in the master bedroom on the second floor, according to a release.

Police and emergency medical responders found April Kauffman unconscious and lying face down on the floor, with wounds from multiple gunshots, prosecutors said. She was declared dead about 11:45 a.m.

The case languished for years despite receiving media attention from around the world.
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Now the Atlantic County prosecutor’s office said that it believes that Kauffman’s killing came after divorce discussions took a particularly bitter turn.

“James Kauffman stated he would sooner kill April than grant the divorce and lose ‘half his empire,’ ” a release from the prosecutor’s office said. His wife “threatened” certain steps to obtain a divorce, spending as much money as she could and threatening to expose the illegal drug operation at James Kauffman’s medical office, prosecutors said.

Kauffman solicited Augello to murder his wife in 2011, the office said.

“Ultimately, James Kauffman made the decision to kill April Kauffman,” the office reported in a release, adding that “Kauffman told Augello that April threatened to expose the illegal OXY distribution network they had established.”

Ed Jacobs, Kauffman’s lawyer, told the Philadelphia Inquirer that Kauffman has long maintained his innocence. “Suffice it to say that Dr. Kauffman has consistently denied any involvement whatsoever in the homicide of his wife,” Jacobs told the newspaper. It was not immediately clear whether Augello or the other defendants in the case had lawyers.

Prosecutors said the racketeering operation involved Kauffman giving free pain medication prescriptions to people sent by Augello, who would receive about $1,000 per prescription and a number of pills once they had been filled. Those without insurance were required to pay $100 per visit, prosecutors said. Six other people besides Kauffman and Augello were charged with racketeering in the case; every person involved in the enterprise was “a Pagan, former Pagan or an associate of a Pagan,” prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said Augello propositioned a number of people connected with the Pagans for the killing. After nearly a year, he found Francis Mullholland, a cousin of a Pagan associate and a member of the drug enterprise, prosecutors said.

On the day of April Kauffman’s death, Mullholland was given a ride to the house, prosecutors said. The doors were left open and Mullholland went inside, shot her twice and left, prosecutors said. They believe that both Mullholland and his cousin were given payments; Mullholland said he was given $20,000 for his role, but officials believe that number may be higher.

Mullholland died after what officials believe was an accidental overdose in 2013, NJ.com reported.

The drug enterprise continued for more than five years after the killing, prosecutors said, until James Kauffman was arrested in June.

Officials at the time found Kauffman at his office in Egg Harbor Township while executing a search warrant, according to news reports. Prosecutors said that he brandished a 9mm handgun in front of officers, surrendering only after a standoff involving a hostage negotiator. He was charged with unlawful possession of a weapon and obstruction, the prosecutor’s office said. Officials said that the arrest was not related to April Kauffman’s death but other crimes at the time, the Press reported.

In 2013, James Kauffman filed a lawsuit against a life insurance company to receive a payout for his wife, but the company said it could not give him the money until it verified that he wasn’t involved in her death, according to the Press of Atlantic City. His
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wife’s daughter, Kim Pack, a beneficiary of the plan, claimed publicly that she believed Kauffman was responsible for her mother’s murder, and filed her own lawsuit in court to claim the insurance, the Press reported. The doctor had remarried by 2014, the newspaper said.

Pack, April Kauffman’s daughter from a previous relationship, spoke to reporters Tuesday.

“I have been waiting patiently for justice and today I was lucky enough to be granted justice,” she told reporters in a video published by ABC. “I think for the first time today I can actually breathe. For the past five and a half years, I feel like I’ve been holding my breath on a daily basis.”

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