Department of Justice

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FACT SHEET

PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS: AMERICA'S NETWORK AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE

Understanding the Problem:
Gun Violence Remains a Major Problem in the United States.

- **More than 10,000 people are murdered with guns every year.** Despite an overall decline in the number of gun homicides during the last fifteen years, the incidence of gun violence remains intolerably high. In 2001, guns were involved in over one-third of a million violent crimes[1] -- 10,131 people were murdered with guns[2], and 47 of the 51 law enforcement officers killed in the United States died from gunshot wounds[3]. Of all homicides committed in 2001, firearms were involved in 63.4%.[4]

- **Gun violence takes a serious toll on America's youth.** The impact of gun violence is particularly severe on our children and young adults. Of the approximately 1,400 juveniles murdered in 2001, 44% were killed with a firearm.[5] Over 2,800 students were expelled in 1999-2000 for bringing guns to school. Of these, 43% were in elementary or junior high school.[6]

Project Safe Neighborhoods Is Working to Fight Gun Crime in America:
Implementing Locally-Targeted Gun Violence Initiatives across America.

- **Gun crime reduction is the top domestic criminal justice initiative of President Bush.** Project Safe Neighborhoods is a comprehensive approach to combating gun violence by linking together local, state and federal law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and community leaders to implement a multi-faceted strategy to deter and punish gun violence from all sides. It is a nationwide commitment to reduce gun crime by networking local programs that target gun crime with state and federal efforts, and providing those programs with the tools and resources they need to succeed. Project Safe Neighborhoods is achieving unprecedented coordination among law enforcement officials, with an emphasis on

prevention, tactical intelligence gathering, more aggressive prosecutions, and enhanced accountability through performance measures.

- **Across the nation, 94 Project Safe Neighborhoods Task Forces are working to implement the coordinated strategy to reduce gun violence, led by the U.S. Attorney in each of the federal judicial districts.** U.S. Attorneys have been working side by side with all law enforcement participants in their communities to identify the most pressing crime problems and attack those problems both through prevention and aggressive prosecution.

  - ✓ Each local program is contoured to fit the unique gun crime problem in that district -- it is not the same "one size fits all" program applied uniformly all across America. In fact, local initiatives often have their own name, such as Project I.C.E., Exile, Ceasefire, FACE and others that reflect their local emphasis and approach.

- **Project Safe Neighborhoods expands on existing programs such as Project Exile (Richmond, VA) and Operation Ceasefire (Boston).** Project Exile in Richmond focused on prosecuting gun crimes in federal court under federal law. However, under Project Safe Neighborhoods, criminals who use guns will be prosecuted under federal, state or local laws -- depending on which jurisdiction can provide the most appropriate punishment. Project Exile in Virginia coordinated resources statewide. Project Safe Neighborhoods establishes a nationwide network of programs linked by aggressive cooperation and information sharing.

- **Project Safe Neighborhoods is funding federal, state and local efforts to fight gun violence.** Project Safe Neighborhoods commits substantial resources to address gun violence. PSN is seeking to provide over $901 million over 3 years - and state-of-the-art technology. Funds have been used to hire new federal and state prosecutors, support investigators, provide training, and develop and promote community outreach efforts. The following has occurred during Project Safe Neighborhoods' first full year of operations:

  - ✓ More than 200 new federal prosecutors have been hired to focus on gun violence.
  - ✓ Approximately $63 million in grants have been made available to hire about 550 new state and local gun prosecutors to focus on gun violence.
  - ✓ Nearly 400 new ATF agents have been hired as part of PSN to investigate gun crimes.
  - ✓ Approximately $70 million in grants have been issued to state and local governments to assist local efforts in preventing and combating gun violence.
  - ✓ Regional and national PSN training has been provided to more than 10,000 individuals across the nation who work to make our communities safer.

Taking Steps to Prosecute Criminals Who Abuse Guns:
In FY 2002, Project Safe Neighborhoods resulted in dramatic increases in federal *and* state gun prosecutions.

- **Largest recorded increase in federal firearms prosecutions.** In FY 2002, federal prosecutions of defendants committing firearms offenses increased by 20.2% -- the highest increase since the Department of Justice began recording this information.

- ✓ Since this Administration began implementing Project Safe Neighborhoods in 2001, federal prosecutions of firearms charges have increased 32%.

- **Record number of defendants charged and convicted under Project Safe Neighborhoods.** In FY 2002, 10,634 defendants were charged in the federal system for violating firearms statutes -- the largest number ever prosecuted in a single year. Also, 7,747 defendants were convicted of violating federal firearms laws -- the largest number ever convicted in the federal system in a single year.

- **Defendants are being sentenced to serious jail time under Project Safe Neighborhoods.** Over half of all defendants convicted were sentenced to more than 5 years in federal prison. 71% of defendants were sentenced to prison sentences greater than three years. Nearly all convicted defendants, 93%, were sentenced to some time in prison.

  - ✓ Since two-thirds of all gun crimes are committed by repeat offenders, this emphasis on prosecuting individuals who commit these offenses takes some of the most dangerous criminals off our streets and out of our communities.

- **State and local prosecutions are also increasing under PSN**. Working alongside their federal counterparts, state and local prosecutors are also prosecuting gun crimes at higher rates.

  - ✓ For example, in Las Vegas, the number of firearms cases handled by the District Attorney has increased by 100%, while federal prosecutions in Nevada rose by 54%.

Launching a Mass Media Campaign to Deter Illegal Gun Use:

A new Public Service Advertising (PSA) Campaign warns of the impact of illegal gun use.

- **A new public service advertising campaign is ready to launch: "Gun Crimes Hit Home."** A critical element of every local gun violence reduction initiative is an aggressive community outreach campaign that couples a strong enforcement message with prevention and education messages. At the core of this community outreach campaign is the message of prevention, while warning criminals that they will do "hard time for gun crime." This message is already being used effectively across the nation. The Department of Justice, in collaboration with the Ad Council and the National Crime Prevention Council, has also developed a new PSA campaign focusing on prevention. The PSA campaign's theme is "you do the crime, your family does the time." The campaign focuses on the many consequences that occur when guns are used illegally.

  - ✓ Much of the success credited to Boston's Operation Ceasefire is a result of an effective community outreach campaign. For example, in Boston, following implementation of the Ceasefire Program, the monthly number of youth homicides decreased by 63% and there has been a 25% decrease in the monthly number of citywide all-age gun assault incidents. Much of this decline is attributed to changed attitudes and beliefs of criminals, law enforcement, and the community resulting from a strong outreach campaign.

Providing Voluntary Gun Locks to Every Household in America Through Project Childsafe:

Firearm safety kits are being made available to every household in America.

- **Project ChildSafe, being announced this week, is a firearms safety education program and a key component of President Bush's Project Safe Neighborhoods program.** During President Bush's campaign, he pledged to distribute 65 million gun locks throughout the nation. Project ChildSafe, administered by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), delivers on this pledge. NSSF has distributed over four million firearm safety kits nationwide in the last three years, most recently under a congressionally earmarked program entitled Project HomeSafe. Under the expanded program, in 2003, NSSF will distribute 20 million safety kits nationwide in partnership with local law enforcement agencies in communities across the country. Each kit contains printed materials on both safe gun storage and gun safety information, as well as a cable-style gun lock. In partnership with local law enforcement groups, NSSF will use a fleet of mobile classrooms to bring the safe storage message to local communities. NSSF will also develop a series of public service announcements to carry a compatible firearms safety message to the public.

Integrating the ATF into the Justice Department and PSN:

Integration will improve information sharing and cooperation among DOJ components.

- **The integration of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) into the Justice Department, and the hiring of 400 new ATF agents to support Project Safe Neighborhoods, will assist in the national strategy to decrease gun crimes.** The Justice Department's law enforcement efforts will be assisted by the nearly 4,800 dedicated ATF employees who join the Department as part of the federal government's reorganization – including 2,300 special agents with expertise in firearms, explosives and arson investigations – and specialized laboratories.

- **The Attorney General announced several additional steps to ensure that the combined efforts are as effective as possible in making our communities safer from gun violence.** These measures include:

  - ✓ The Attorney General directed all U.S. Attorneys and corresponding ATF Special Agents in Charge to coordinate the referral guidelines and criteria for the investigation and prosecution of gun cases in federal court, and to ensure cases not brought in federal court are referred to state prosecutors where appropriate.

  - ✓ The Attorney General directed the integration of the Department and ATF's case referral information systems to ensure one coordinated system for tracking gun case referrals and prosecutions.

  - ✓ The Attorney General asked all U.S. Attorneys, together with ATF and the Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys, to review the progress made on his June 2001 directive to

pursue "lie and try" cases – where criminals lie about their past criminal convictions and are denied a gun sale because a Brady background check catches the lie. This is a violation of federal firearms laws, which the Department is fully committed to enforcing.

✓ The Attorney General also directed the Criminal Division, ATF and other components to review the adequacy of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines in punishing gun traffickers, including "straw purchasers" – individuals with clean records who buy a few guns to sell to armed criminals who would not be able to purchase guns legally.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Success Stories:

Across the nation, PSN's strategy of locally-targeted programs is reaping results.

- **Alaska: Dismantling Violent Gangs, One Prosecution at a Time.** One recent successful prosecution in which PSN played an important role involved a notorious Anchorage gang called the Good Boys Trece Surenos (GTS). According to the indictments in the case, those seeking membership in the GTS gang were required to commit multiple armed robberies to show their commitment and loyalty. The target of the gang crime was a local motel. In the course of a single month, gang members were charged with hitting the motel on three separate occasions, leaving each time with the entire contents of the motel's cash register. On the night of January 30, 2001, an employee at the motel shot one of the robbers as he brandished a handgun and attempted to take the motel's cash. Following a joint investigation by the Anchorage Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, several gang leaders were apprehended and indicted by the U.S. Attorney's Office on robbery and firearms charges. In coordination with the District Attorney's office, numerous other gang members were arrested and charged under state law. The successful investigation of the GTS gang members and their spree of crimes was greatly facilitated by the high degree of cooperation between federal and local law enforcement officers. Most importantly, the convictions in this case of both aspiring and high-ranking gang members led to the total dissolution of the GTS gang.

- **Missouri: Murder Level Reaches Lowest Level in Thirty Years.** In Kansas City, federal prosecutions increased by 26% last year, while the murder rate dropped 23% to its lowest level in three decades. This reduction translates to real people: 27 people are living today who would have been murdered the preceding year.

- **Florida: Operation HALT the Violence.** The Middle District of Florida aims to reduce firearm violence and illicit gun trafficking through Operation HALT (Handguns/Ammo/Long guns Trafficking) the Violence! The federal commitment to reduce violent crime through this program is responsible for the recent indictment of David Decal Owenby, a convicted felon charged with assembling hand grenades. In January 2002 a pipe bomb was found near an apartment complex in Brevard County, Florida. During the sheriff's investigation, several apartment residents indicated that they had seen bomb-making books, rifles, and two grenades inside Owenby's apartment. After obtaining a search warrant, the ATF investigation revealed lengths of cannon fuse, various tools, containers of powder, two

grenades (one of which was "live" at the time of the search warrant), two rifles, and ammunition. Owenby was arrested and pled guilty to the charge of felon in possession and the possession of a firearm not registered to him in the National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record. This violent felon posed an immediate and dangerous threat to society and is now serving a lengthy prison sentence as a result of the cooperative efforts promoted by the U.S. Attorney's Office.

- **California: Taking Violent Offenders to Task.** Under the PSN initiative, eight members and associates of the Vagos Outlaw Motorcycle Gang have been charged with federal narcotics and firearms offenses, and three members were also charged in Orange County Superior Court. The two-year investigation resulted in the purchase and seizure of 95 firearms, including machineguns, sawed-off shotguns, and assault rifles. This initiative in the Central District of California has also brought to justice numerous individuals who are members of the district's most violent street gangs.

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[1] Federal Bureau of Investigation. Uniform Crime Report, 2001. Trend data charts combining murder, aggravated assault, and robbery: http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_01/01crime2.pdf.

[2] Federal Bureau of Investigation. Uniform Crime Report, 2001. Trend data chart for murder, as well as Table 2.9, "Murder, Types of Weapons Used." http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_01/01crime2.pdf.

[3] Bureau of Justice Statistics. "Homicide Trends in the U.S." http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/tables/leoktab.htm.

[4] Federal Bureau of Investigation. Uniform Crime Report, 2001. Table 2.9: "Murder, Types of Weapons Used." http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_01/01crime2.pdf.

[5] Federal Bureau of Investigation. Uniform Crime Report, 2001. Table 2.11: "Murder Victims by Age by Weapon." http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_01/01crime2.pdf.

[6] U.S. Department of Education. *Report on State/Territory Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act.* http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSDFS/gfsareport99_2000.pdf.