

## NEWS RELEASE

**Date:** Wednesday, March 04, 2009

**From:** U.S. Attorney Gregory G. Lockhart  
FBI - Cincinnati, Keith L. Bennett, Special Agent in Charge  
Columbus Police Chief Walter Distelzweig  
Franklin County Sheriff Jim Karnes  
Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray/Bureau of Criminal  
Identification and Investigation  
Delaware County Sheriff Walter Davis

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### **29 CHARGED WITH OPERATING DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION IN COLUMBUS AREA**

#### *“Operation Georgia Peach” links Columbus with interstate drug trafficking*

COLUMBUS -- Teams of federal, state and local law enforcement agents today began arresting 29 people charged in a federal indictment with participating in a drug trafficking organization. The charges are the result of a year-long investigation by the FBI, Columbus Police, Franklin County Sheriff’s Office and the Ohio Attorney General’s Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCI). A document listing the defendants and the charges they face is attached.

Gregory G. Lockhart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio; Keith L. Bennett, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Cincinnati Field Division, Columbus Police Chief Walter Distelzweig, Franklin County Sheriff Jim Karnes, Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray, and Delaware County Sheriff Walter Davis announced the indictment which was returned on February 26 and unsealed today following the arrests.

The indictment charges MAURICE WILLIAMS, age 33, of Columbus, Ohio and Decatur, Georgia, with operating a continuing criminal enterprise.

“Williams is accused of engaging in a series of ongoing drug deals involving at least five other people,” Lockhart said. “Williams allegedly held the top spot in the organization, and obtained substantial income from the operation, which the federal government intends to seize.”

Williams faces at least 20 years and up to life imprisonment if convicted of operating a continuing criminal enterprise.

Twenty-one of the 29 defendants in the indictment are charged with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine, punishable by at least ten years and up to life imprisonment.

The 147-count indictment also includes firearms charges, use of a telephone in furtherance of a drug crime, and maintaining a house for the purpose of distributing drugs. The indictment also seeks forfeiture of all cash, coins, jewelry, and vehicles, and 36 firearms seized during the course of the investigation.

Defendants will have initial appearances in U.S. District Court. Trial dates will be scheduled.

Lockhart commended the cooperative investigation by the officers with the Columbus Police Strategic Response Bureau, the Delaware County Drug Task Force, and agents participating in the FBI Task Force, as well as Assistant U.S. Attorneys David DeVillers and Robyn Hahnert, who are prosecuting the case.

An indictment is merely an accusation. All defendants should be presumed innocent until and unless the government proves their guilt beyond a reasonable doubt in court.

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