



**U.S. Department of Justice**

***United States Attorney  
Eastern District of Arkansas***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**CONTACT: Bud Cummins  
United States Attorney  
501-340-2601 or  
501-831-6125**

**COOPERATIVE EFFORT THROUGH PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS  
NETS FIFTEEN YEARS FOR GUN TOTING DRUG DEALER**

**Little Rock-** Bud Cummins, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, announced that Marcos Antonio Ponce, 35, of Little Rock, Arkansas, was sentenced yesterday by U.S. District Judge James M. Moody, Jr.

According to the Indictments, Criminal Information and the proceedings in this case, on April 4, 2003, Ponce along with co-defendants Jose Mendiola, David Islas and Chris L. Alexander committed an armed kidnaping of three individuals at Art's Liquor, 6909 Arch Street in Little Rock. This armed kidnaping was designed to collect payment on a marihuana debt owed in this case.

Ponce pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute more than 100 kilograms of marihuana, conspiracy to launder drug proceeds, discharging a firearm during a drug trafficking crime, and criminal forfeiture of real property charges on September 27, 2005.

During yesterday's proceedings, Ponce was held responsible for his conduct during the kidnaping of using a firearm during a drug trafficking offense, and was assessed responsibility for conspiracy to distribute between 400 kilograms and 700 kilograms of marihuana. Ponce was also sentenced for his role in conspiring to launder the proceeds of drug trafficking. Investigators discovered that Ponce was conducting wire transfers of drug money from the Eastern District of Arkansas to individuals in Texas. Judge Moody ordered the forfeiture of Ponce's interest in property located at 7709 Woodhaven – a residence utilized to store and distribute illegal drugs – and Art's Liquor, 6909 Arch Street, both in Little Rock.

District Judge Moody sentenced Ponce to a total term of 183 months in prison without parole. Terms of 63 months imprisonment to be served concurrently were imposed for

conspiracy to distribute more than 100 kilograms of marihuana and conspiracy to launder drug proceeds. A 120-month term of imprisonment to be served consecutively to the other sentences in this case was ordered for Ponce's use of firearms during the drug trafficking crime.

Jose Mendiola, Chris L. Alexander, Daniel Javier Jiminez and Mark Stephen Fouts, co-defendants in the original Indictments filed in this case, have each entered guilty pleas to various charges in the proceedings and are awaiting sentencing by District Judge Moody. The remaining defendants charged along with Ponce in the pending Superseding Indictment are scheduled for trial commencing July 10, 2006.

"This is a good example of how our law enforcement partnerships have resulted in a significant sentence for someone using guns and selling drugs in the community," stated Cummins. "Project Safe Neighborhoods is our strategy to find the maximum prison time for someone like this. Local prosecutors, local police departments, and federal agencies all worked together in this case. The result is the removal of this threat from the community for over fifteen years without parole."

This matter is designated as a Project Safe Neighborhoods case. Project Safe Neighborhoods is a federal initiative aimed at reducing gun crime by networking local prosecutors and law enforcement with federal counterparts. Those prosecuted under federal statutes serve longer sentences partly due to the fact that there is no parole in the federal system.

Senior Litigation Counsel Kevin Alexander prosecuted this case for the United States. Ponce's prosecution and conviction is the result of the combined efforts of the participants in the District's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Little Rock Police Department, the Pulaski County Sheriff's Office, the Arkansas State Police and the Arkansas Highway Police all contributed to this successful prosecution effort.

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