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**10 NEW DEFENDANTS FACING FEDERAL GUN CHARGES AS PART OF
PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS ENFORCEMENT STRATEGY**

CHICAGO – Two south suburban men who allegedly were involved in a shooting last summer outside the Markham Courthouse are among 10 new defendants who are now facing strict federal firearms charges, the state, federal and local law enforcement partners in Project Safe Neighborhoods announced today. Now in its fifth year in Chicago, the local model of PSN, a national anti-gun violence program, is widely acclaimed for its role in contributing to Chicago's reduced homicide rate and lower recidivism among state parolees for new gun crimes in certain targeted police districts.

The two men, **Francisco Lavine** and **Alfred Taylor**, were allegedly friends of a man standing trial for murder in the south suburban Cook County courthouse when they opened fire on two other men who were believed to be friends of the murder victim. No one was hurt in the July 27, 2005, shooting. Lavine, 27, of Harvey and Taylor, 21, of Phoenix, Ill., were chased by Markham police as they sped away in a car after the shooting. Markham police arrested the pair after they crashed into light pole near 135th and Kedzie.

A federal grand jury indicted Lavine and Taylor in May, charging each with one count of illegal possession of a firearm after having been previously convicted of a felony, also known as

being a felon-in-possession. Lavine possessed a 9 mm Taurus and Taylor possessed a .22 caliber Walther P22, according to the indictment. Both have pleaded not guilty and are being detained in federal custody without bond. The government is being represented in court by Assistant U.S. Attorney James Barz.

The Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) partners are marking the anniversary of the program in Chicago by bringing federal charges in this case and others that build on PSN's initial foundation – federal prosecution of state defendants for gun crimes to obtain longer sentences and to use those cases to deter illegal gun possession and change behavior to make gun crimes less prevalent. At the same time, the PSN partners are continuing to strengthen and build other key elements of the program, including award-winning “parolee forums,” which were pioneered in Chicago to communicate directly with felons convicted of gun crimes, advertising campaigns and juvenile outreach. Three west side Chicago Police districts – the 10th (Marquette), 11th (Harrison) and 15th (Austin) districts, and two on the south side – the 7th (Englewood) and 9th (Deering) – remain the focus of PSN enforcement and deterrence efforts.

In all, authorities today announced eight new federal cases charging a total of 10 defendants, each with being a felon-in-possession of firearms. Several defendants face additional related charges.

Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, announced the new cases with primary PSN partners Andrew L. Traver, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Philip J. Cline, Superintendent of the Chicago Police Department; Richard A. Devine, Cook County State's Attorney; Roger E. Walker, Jr., Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections; and Jesse Reyes, Acting Chief of the Cook County Adult Probation Department. In addition, the Secret Service and the police departments in Elgin and Markham each assisted in one of these cases.

“PSN is having a real impact in Chicago thanks to the consistency of our message,” Mr. Fitzgerald said. “That message is simple: if you pick up a gun, you are facing serious federal prison time. Hundreds of convicted felons and gang members are getting this message, and every time an individual makes the right choice and puts down a guns, that adds to our success.”

Mr. Traver said: “ATF will continue to concentrate our enforcement efforts on firearms offenders who terrorize the community with indiscriminate violence. We will continue to work in partnership with our law enforcement counterparts, state and federal prosecutors, and the citizens themselves to make an impact in those neighborhoods plagued by gun and gang violence.”

Launched in 2002, PSN combines the efforts and resources of local police and federal agents, state and federal prosecutors, parole and probation officials, social services and civic organizations to reduce gun violence using a multi-disciplinary approach. By transferring some cases from state to federal prosecution – as is being done with the cases announced today – PSN attempts to obtain the longest sentences for the worst offenders and, at the same time, to change behavior through deterrence. Additional elements of PSN include a multimedia campaign and juvenile prevention outreach in schools.

Under this aspect of the program, individuals with felony convictions who are arrested with a gun in their possession are reviewed for possible federal prosecution, which often carries steep federal prison sentences, with at least 85 percent of the sentence served in prisons outside Illinois and there is no parole. Since 2002, approximately 350 such cases have been brought in Federal Court here, with a priority on cases from PSN’s five target police districts. The average sentence in PSN cases from the targeted districts has been approximately 10 years and some defendants have been sentenced as high as 30 years.

In an effort to deter felons from picking up a gun in the first place, PSN tells felons about the likelihood of steep federal prison sentences if they are caught with a gun. One way this is done is through PSN's parolee forums, which recently was recognized by the Justice Department as the most innovative prevention strategy under PSN nationwide. About twice a month, state parolees and probationers with prior gun convictions who were released to the PSN districts meet with representatives from both law enforcement and the community. They receive two messages: they will serve long federal prison terms far from home if they are caught carrying a gun, and there are opportunities available to them for job training, job placement, education, and counseling. Research has shown that the parolees who attended a PSN forum are far less likely to commit a new gun crime than similarly-situated parolees who do not attend a forum. The parolee forums are run by the Illinois Department of Corrections, and the probationer forums are run by the Cook County Adult Probation Department.

In addition to PSN, the Chicago Police in recent years have launched a multiple anti-violent crime initiatives, including blue-light surveillance cameras and targeted response teams, all of which are credited with contributing to the decline in the city's homicide rate.

Details of the other cases announced today follow:

United States v. Rey

Pedro Rey, 37, of Chicago, was arrested today after being charged with one count of being a felon-in-possession in an indictment returned yesterday. The indictment alleges that on Oct. 2, 2005, Rey illegally possessed a .22 caliber revolver containing five bullets. He was expected to be arraigned later today in U.S. District Court. (AUSA Charles Ex)

United States v. Love, et al.

Demetre Love, 31, also known as "Mechi," was arrested today after being charged with one count of being a felon-in-possession, and his brother **Lecorey Love**, 27, aka "Lil' C," was charged with five counts of being a felon-in-possession in an indictment returned yesterday. A warrant was issued for Lecorey Love's arrest. Both are from the city's south side. The

indictment alleges that between July and December 2003, each illegally possessed various firearms, including a .12 gauge shotgun that possessed jointly. Separately, Lecorey Love allegedly illegally possessed other firearms, including another shotgun, rifles, revolvers, pistols, an M1 carbine, a Sig Sauer 9 mm semi-automatic pistol and more than 100 rounds of 9 mm ammunition. (AUSA Carole Ryczek)

United States v. Vargas

Laurin Vargas, 37, of Chicago, was charged with one count of being a felon-in-possession and three counts of distribution of cocaine in an indictment returned yesterday. The indictment alleges that on Aug. 18, 2005, Vargas illegally possessed a loaded Sturm Ruger .357 caliber revolver with an obliterated serial number, which he sold to an undercover police officer. He is in state custody and will be arraigned at a later date in U.S. District Court. (AUSA Nancy Miller)

United States v. Smith

Curtis Smith, 45, of Chicago, was charged with one count of being a felon-in-possession, one count of possession with intent to distribute cocaine and heroin, and one count of carrying a firearm while committing a drug offense in an indictment returned yesterday. The indictment alleges that on Jan. 30, 2005, Smith illegally possessed a pistol when he was arrested by Chicago police officers during an alleged drug transaction. He is in state custody and will be arraigned at a later date in U.S. District Court. (AUSA Carrie Hamilton)

United States v. Byrd

Raymond Byrd, 55, of Chicago, was charged with one count of being a felon-in-possession in an indictment returned late yesterday. The indictment alleges that on June 9, 2004, Byrd illegally possessed a .357 magnum revolver when he was arrested by Chicago police officers who stopped his car for multiple traffic violations. He is in state custody and will be arraigned at a later date in U.S. District Court. (AUSA John Podliska)

United States v. Johnson

Lorenzo D. Johnson, 29, of Chicago, was charged with one count of being a felon-in-possession in an indictment returned on Tuesday. The indictment alleges that on Nov. 21, 2005, Johnson illegally possessed a .22 caliber revolver and ammunition when he was arrested by Chicago police officers who had received a tip that Johnson was carrying a gun. When officers saw and felt a weapon during a pat down search, Johnson allegedly spun around and struck an officer in the face, knocking him to the ground. After a short chase on foot, Johnson was apprehended by two other officers. He is in state custody and will be arraigned at a later date in U.S. District Court. (AUSA John Scully)

United States v. Rome

Michael Rome, 19, of Elgin, was charged with one count of being a felon-in-possession and one count of manufacturing counterfeit currency in an indictment returned on May 18. The indictment alleges that on Jan. 29, 2006, Rome illegally possessed a .12 gauge shotgun and counterfeit currency when a probation officer visited his residence. He is in state custody and will be arraigned at a later date in U.S. District Court. (AUSA Leonard Gail)

In each case, if convicted of being a felon-in-possession, the defendants face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Any defendant who is also convicted of being an Armed Career Criminal, faces a mandatory minimum prison term of 15 years in prison and a maximum of life. In all cases, the Court would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The public is reminded in each case that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

For more information about PSN on the Internet, see www.psnchicago.org and www.psn.gov

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