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News Release

United States Attorney Richard S. Hartunian announced today that the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit has affirmed the racketeering convictions of five members of the former Syracuse street gang, Elk Block. Defendants Dennis Jones, age 41, Jerrawn Thomas, age 29, Gregory Thomas, age 28, William Robinson, age 29 and Ismail Pierce, age 29, were convicted of federal RICO charges on December 19, 2006 following a four week trial in U.S. District Court in Syracuse.

In May, 2007, Chief District Judge Norman A. Mordue sentenced both Jerrawn Thomas and William Robinson to life imprisonment. Dennis Jones and Gregory Thomas were each sentenced to 30 years imprisonment. Ismail Pierce was sentenced to 27 years imprisonment.

On appeal, the defendants principally challenged (1) whether the existence of a RICO enterprise is a necessary element that the government must prove to establish a RICO conspiracy in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1962(d); (2) whether there was sufficient evidence to prove an agreement that the enterprise would be established; and (3) whether the district court's failure to require unanimity as to which predicate acts the defendants agreed to cooperate was reversible error, the district court having instructed the jury that it must find each defendant agreed to commit at least two racketeering acts and agree unanimously on the type of racketeering acts each defendant agreed to commit. In affirming the convictions, the Court rejected the defendants' claims.

The original indictment charged 16 members of the Elk Block Gang with engaging in a pattern of racketeering activity from 1995 through 2005. The indictment charged 54 racketeering acts, including multiple acts of narcotics possession and distribution, firearms possession, shootings and murder. The gang's territory, located in Syracuse, New York, was bordered by South Salina Street on the west, Interstate 81 on the east, Colvin Street on the north, and McAllister Avenue on the south.

The evidence at trial included not only law enforcement witnesses but cooperating defendants, who were former Elk Block Gang members, who described Elk Block's

geographic territory, gang signs, graffiti, clothing, tattoos, drug dealing, use of firearms and utilization of violence for the protection and maintenance of control over the cocaine base (crack) sales in Elk Block territory. There was also evidence of a multitude of shootings, including the murders of rival Boot Camp members Jeffrey Conners on April 14, 2000 and Delmar Everson on April 27, 2003. Eleven defendants pled guilty to the indictment and the remaining five defendants, named above, proceeded to trial.

United States Attorney Richard S. Hartunian said, "We are very pleased with the decision rendered by the Second Circuit affirming these convictions. It is a recognition of the tireless efforts of the local, state and federal law enforcement agencies that make up the Syracuse Gang Violence Task Force. We will continue to use all of our resources to aggressively combat gang crime and gun violence within the City of Syracuse."

This prosecution resulted from a joint investigation conducted by the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (Syracuse office), the Syracuse Police Department and the Onondaga County Sheriff's Department, with the assistance from the Onondaga County District Attorney's Office, the United States Marshals Service, the New York State Police, and the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys John M. Katko and John G. Duncan. Further questions or inquiries may be directed to Mr. Katko or Mr. Duncan at 315-448-0672.