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**BRONX MAN CONVICTED OF CROSS-COUNTRY COCAINE
DISTRIBUTION SCHEME AND WEAPONS POSSESSION**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New York Field Division ("DEA"), and PETER J. SMITH, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") announced that JASON NEAL, 33, a resident of the Bronx, New York, was found guilty by a jury today in Manhattan federal court of crimes related to NEAL's orchestration of a cross-country narcotics transportation scheme and possession of a firearm in furtherance of the scheme. The Honorable MIRIAM GOLDMAN CEDARBAUM presided over the seven-day trial. According to the charges and the evidence at trial:

NEAL arranged a scheme to purchase cocaine in Los Angeles, California, and transport it to New York City for resale. To transport the drugs, NEAL purchased a van and had it outfitted with a secret compartment where the cocaine was hidden.

On January 9, 2008, an officer with the Utah Highway Patrol stopped the couriers hired by Neal and recovered 5 kilograms of cocaine and two handguns: (1) a .50 caliber Desert

Eagle semi-automatic handgun and (2) a .40 caliber Smith and Wessen semi-automatic weapon. On January 14, 2008, NEAL was arrested when he went to meet the couriers in the Bronx to pick up his cocaine. When NEAL arrived for the meeting, he was carrying a .357 caliber Desert Eagle semi-automatic handgun in a secret compartment in his vehicle.

A search of NEAL'S apartment by federal agents after the arrest uncovered 132 rounds of ammunition, a bullet-proof vest, marijuana, and other drug paraphernalia, all of which was hidden in a secret compartment that was concealed in an end-table.

The jury convicted NEAL of all three charges against him: (1) conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute five kilograms and more of cocaine; (2) possession of marijuana with intent to distribute it; and (3) possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

NEAL faces a maximum term of life imprisonment and a mandatory minimum term of 10 years' imprisonment on the cocaine distribution count, a maximum term of 5 years' imprisonment on the marijuana count, and a maximum term life imprisonment and a mandatory consecutive term of 5 years' imprisonment on the firearms count.

The investigation was conducted by the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force ("OCDESF"), which is comprised of agents and officers of DEA, ICE, the United States Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the New York Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the New York State Police, the United States Marshals Service, the United States Secret Service, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

The prosecution is being handled by the Office's Violent Crimes Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys AMY R. LESTER and JOHN J. O'DONNELL are in charge of the prosecution.

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