



U. S. Department of Justice

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ARMED CAREER CRIMINAL SENTENCED TO OVER 19 YEARS IN PRISON FOR FIREARM POSSESSION

GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA – James Wilkerson, 43, of Citra, Florida, was sentenced on December 1, 2020, to a total of 19 and a half years in federal prison after a federal jury convicted him of possessing a firearm as a convicted felon on July 24, 2020. Lawrence Keefe, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida, announced the sentence.

“The threat posed to our communities by this violent career criminal has been eliminated,” said U.S. Attorney Keefe. “This sentence not only fits the defendant’s history of crime, but it is also key to protecting public safety. The collaborative efforts of our partners in the Gainesville Gun Violence Initiative continue to yield impactful results, and we will continue working tirelessly to make North Florida safer.”

On October 30, 2018, in response to a number of violent crimes occurring in a vacant lot in northeast Gainesville, Gainesville Police Department (GPD) detectives were conducting follow-up investigation in relation to an unsolved homicide when they observed Wilkerson and another person sitting under a tent in the vacant lot. The detectives approached the tent and made contact with Wilkerson, who was clenching one of his hands, as if he was concealing something. The detectives also noticed the odor of marijuana as they approached the tent. Wilkerson refused to comply with lawful commands from the detectives and began to resist their attempts to detain him for further investigation. After a brief struggle, Wilkerson was detained and a small baggie of drugs was recovered.

Detectives then searched the area where Wilkerson had been sitting and located a loaded .32 caliber pistol amongst some trash, which would have been immediately adjacent to Wilkerson’s feet. Wilkerson, a convicted felon, was arrested for possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

DNA forensic analysis conducted by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement crime lab was instrumental in proving that the firearm belonged to Wilkerson.

Additional investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) revealed that Wilkerson had multiple prior felony convictions, including aggravated assault, robbery with a firearm, trafficking in cocaine, and possession of cocaine. Due to his criminal record, Wilkerson qualified as an Armed Career Criminal, which allowed for an enhanced sentence, including a fifteen year minimum mandatory term of imprisonment.

“As a felon, with several prior convictions for violent crimes, this sentence will remove this individual from our streets and put him in federal prison where he will serve a lengthy sentence,” said ATF Special Agent in Charge Craig W. Saier.

This sentencing resulted from the collaborative work of the Gainesville Police Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Chris Elsey.

The GPD Detectives Division notes, “This sentence is another example of how the Gainesville Gun Violence Initiative is benefiting our neighbors and making our City safer. As our Department continues to seek ways to curb gun violence in Gainesville, we are grateful for our local, state, and federal partners that work tirelessly to bring these violent criminals to justice.”

The Gainesville Gun Violence Initiative (GVI) was established in April, 2019, by the United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Florida in an effort to stem the escalating gun violence in Gainesville and the surrounding area. As GVI partners, the State Attorney’s Office for the Eighth Judicial Circuit, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Gainesville Police Department, the Alachua County Sheriff’s Office, the Alachua Police Department, the University of Florida Police Department, and the Florida Department of Corrections share this commitment to protecting public safety.

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