U.S. ATTORNEY’S OFFICE PROVIDES UPDATE ON FEDERAL PROSECUTIONS AND ONGOING STRATEGIES TO COMBAT VIOLENT CRIME IN CHICAGO

CHICAGO — John R. Lausch, Jr., United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, today provided an update on federal prosecutions and strategies to combat violent crime in Chicago and the surrounding area.

The centerpiece of the Department of Justice’s violent crime reduction efforts continues to be Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN). PSN is an evidence-based program proven to be effective at reducing violent crime. Through PSN, a broad spectrum of stakeholders works together to identify the most pressing violent crime problems in the community and develops comprehensive solutions to address them. As part of this strategy, PSN focuses enforcement efforts on the most violent offenders and partners with locally based prevention and reentry programs for lasting reductions in crime.

The Department of Justice this summer announced the formation of five cross-jurisdictional strike forces, one of which is based in Chicago and led by the U.S. Attorney Lausch, to help reduce gun violence by disrupting illegal firearms trafficking. As part of the Chicago strike force, the U.S. Attorney’s Office collaborates with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and other federal, state, and local law enforcement partners in the Northern District of Illinois and across the country to help stem the supply of illegally trafficked firearms and identify patterns, leads, and potential suspects in violent gun crimes. The Chicago strike force’s efforts have been
substantially enhanced by the Chicago Police Department’s (CPD’s) recently created Gun Investigations Team.

“Straw purchasers and firearms traffickers enable violence,” said U.S. Attorney Lausch. “The cross-jurisdictional strike force has increased collaboration with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners, and enhanced our longstanding efforts to hold accountable individuals or groups who illegally traffic firearms into Chicago.”

In addition to a sustained focus on prosecutions of federal firearm offenses, the U.S. Attorney’s Office endeavors to disrupt violent crime by seeking pre-trial detention for defendants who pose a danger to the community and pursuing appropriate prison sentences to deter dangerous individuals from continuing to cause violence in their communities.

Following up on activities most recently reported in May of this year, the U.S. Attorney’s Office remains active in fighting violent crime through enforcement actions, prosecutions, and community partnerships, as illustrated by the examples below.

**ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS AND PROSECUTION ACTIVITY**

The U.S. Attorney’s Office works closely with U.S. law enforcement agencies, including ATF, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division (IRS-CI), and U.S. Marshals Service (USMS), to investigate and prosecute a variety of violent crimes. State and local partners in this effort include CPD, Illinois State Police (ISP), Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, Cook County Sheriff’s Office, Rockford Police Department, and other police departments throughout northern Illinois.

The primary focus of these collaborative law enforcement efforts is to investigate and prosecute gangs and other groups of individuals who work in concert to commit violent crimes, including murders, attempted murders, robberies, carjackings, drug trafficking, and firearms trafficking. In addition, these enforcement efforts also identify for potential prosecution individual offenders who are drivers of violence.
The U.S. Attorney’s Office’s Gun Crimes Prosecution Team continues to emphasize the prosecution of illegal firearm possession in the most violent police districts in Chicago. Working collaboratively with federal and local law enforcement, the team focuses on charging Chicago’s most dangerous criminals quickly after arrest, endeavoring to disrupt the cycle of violence in the neighborhoods most in need.

“Our Gun Crimes Prosecution Team works tirelessly to investigate and prosecute firearms cases from the Chicago neighborhoods suffering from the most violent crimes,” said U.S. Attorney Lausch. “Our partnerships with CPD and other state and local law enforcement continue to be very strong.”

Firearm and violent crime investigations in Chicago have also been bolstered by an important tool from ATF – the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). NIBIN is the only national network that allows for the capture and comparison of ballistic evidence to aid in solving and preventing violent crimes involving firearms. NIBIN is a proven investigative and intelligence tool that can link firearms from multiple crime scenes, allowing law enforcement to quickly disrupt shooting cycles. Federal, state, and local law enforcement in Chicago have used NIBIN extensively to help solve violent crimes and prosecute trigger-pullers and other gun offenders.

**Racketeering and Gang-Related Prosecutions**

“Combating the unacceptable level of gang violence in Chicago has been and will continue to be a top priority in our office,” said U.S. Attorney Lausch.

- A federal jury this month convicted LABAR SPANN, a leader of the Four Corner Hustlers street gang, on a racketeering conspiracy charge for participating in a criminal organization that committed murders and other acts of violence on the West and Southwest Sides of Chicago. The jury found that Spann participated in four murders in a cold, calculated, and premeditated manner as part of the conspiracy. Spann faces a mandatory term of life in prison when he is sentenced next year. After Spann’s conviction, all nine defendants charged in the case have been convicted of racketeering conspiracy. The investigation was conducted by FBI, ATF, CPD, DEA, IDOC, ISP, Illinois Secretary of State Police Department, Cook County Sheriff’s Office, and Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, with the support of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) and the Chicago High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force (HIDTA).
A racketeering conspiracy indictment unsealed this month charged 13 alleged leaders, members, and associates of the Wicked Town faction of the Traveling Vice Lords street gang with engaging in numerous acts of violence in Chicago, including at least 19 murders and 19 attempted murders. The probe was conducted by ATF, CPD, IRS-CI, DEA, FBI, Cook County Sheriff’s Office, and Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, with the support of OCDETF and HIDTA.

WILLIAM HAYSLETTE, of Chicago, was sentenced last month to 30 years in prison for engaging in racketeering offenses as a “soldier” in the Latin Kings street gang. In addition to committing numerous assaults on behalf of the gang, the sentencing judge also found that Hayslette participated in the murder of Sergio Hernandez in the South Chicago neighborhood of Chicago. Hayslette was indicted in 2018 along with more than 30 other alleged members of the Latin Kings. Nearly all of the charged defendants have pleaded guilty or been convicted at trial, including GERONIA FORD, of Chicago, who was sentenced in September to 29 years in prison for participating in Hernandez’s murder and committing acts of witness intimidation. FBI and CPD led the investigation, with assistance from the Cook County Sheriff’s Office and the Hammond, Ind., Police Department, and the support of OCDETF.

Five alleged members of the O-Block street gang were charged last month with committing murder in aid of racketeering for allegedly killing Carlton Weekly, a Chicago rapper also known as “FBG Duck,” on Aug. 4, 2020, in downtown Chicago. The case was investigated by FBI and CPD, with assistance from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office.

Firearm Trafficking and Firearm Theft Prosecutions

“We are using every available federal law enforcement tool to continue to bring impactful cases that hold firearms traffickers accountable and reduce violent crime in Chicago,” said U.S. Attorney Lausch.

Chicago resident ISMAEL SENE was sentenced last month to a year in federal prison for straw purchasing handguns in the Chicago suburbs. In one of the gun transactions, Sene falsely certified on federal forms that he was the actual buyer. In reality, Sene purchased the gun on behalf of an individual whom Sene had reason to believe was a convicted felon who was prohibited by federal law from purchasing or possessing a firearm. ATF led the probe, with assistance from CPD.

Four men were charged last month with firearm offenses for allegedly trafficking guns from St. Louis to Chicago. The charges accuse ROBERT NARUP, of Washington, Mo., of buying firearms at gun shows throughout the United States and illegally selling them to JEROME BOYKIN, of St. Louis, Mo. Boykin then allegedly brought the guns to Chicago and sold them to ROGELIO MANCERA, of Schaumburg, Ill., in exchange for marijuana.
Mancera allegedly re-sold the guns to RODOLFO ORTEGA, of Chicago, who in turn would sell them on the streets of Chicago. ATF and CPD’s recently created Gun Investigations Team led the probe, with assistance from ATF officials in Missouri and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Missouri.

- A suburban Chicago man was sentenced last month to eight and a half years in federal prison for trafficking dozens of guns from Kentucky to Chicago. Many of the guns trafficked by JOHN PHILLIPS, of Lyons, Ill., were later discovered by law enforcement at crime scenes in Chicago. The investigation was led by ATF’s Chicago office, with assistance from ATF agents in Louisville, Ky., and the support of HIDTA.

- Six individuals were charged in September in the Southern District of Indiana with straw purchasing 90 firearms, more than 20 of which were later discovered at crime scenes in Chicago. ATF led the investigation, with assistance from law enforcement in Chicago.

- The U.S. Attorney’s Office in August successfully moved to revoke the bond that had been set for JAMES MASSEY, of Chicago. Massey is awaiting trial on a charge of inciting rioting involving incidents of property damage and looting in Chicago in the summer of 2020. The judge found that Massey violated the terms of his bond when he allegedly attempted to purchase a firearm in Indiana. Massey is now in federal custody. Trial on the rioting charge is set for Feb. 22, 2022. FBI and CPD investigated the looting case, while ATF investigated the firearm matter.

- PARIS STEELE, of Chicago, was sentenced in August to more than six years in federal prison for unlawfully dealing shotguns and other firearms in Chicago. While Steele was on bond and awaiting trial, he appeared in videos on social media holding a firearm and threatening violence against others. ATF and CPD conducted the investigation.

- A Chicago man was charged in August with making materially false statements in the acquisition of more than 20 firearms. STOVALL BUCHANAN acquired the guns from suburban Chicago firearms dealers and allegedly lied on federal forms about his home address and the actual buyer of the guns. ATF investigated, with assistance from CPD.

- Chicago resident JUSTIN GARCIA was charged in August with straw purchasing handguns in a suburban Chicago store on behalf of another individual. ATF investigated, with assistance from CPD.

- Two days after the fatal shooting of Chicago Police Officer Ella French, a Hammond, Ind., man was charged with conspiring to straw purchase the semi-automatic handgun used in the shooting. JAMEL DANZY purchased the gun at a firearms dealer in Hammond and allegedly falsely certified on the required forms that he was the actual buyer. The charges allege that Danzy was a straw purchaser who bought the gun at the request of a convicted
felon who was found in possession of the gun after the shootings of Officer French and her partner. ATF and CPD led the probe.

- JOSUE CANALES, of Chicago, was charged in June with trafficking a loaded submachine gun and dealing cocaine in the city. FBI and the CPD led the investigation.
- Three Chicago men were charged this summer with unlawfully dealing or possessing firearms in the city. JOHNATHAN BURGOS allegedly illegally dealt firearms in Chicago, while ALEJANDRO DAVIS and DAMIAN REYES were charged with illegally possessing firearms as previously convicted felons. FBI and the CPD conducted the investigation.
- RONEAL NIGHTENGALE, Glendale Heights, Ill., and ERIC ROWE, of Bellwood, Ill., were charged in June with conspiring to steal a dozen handguns from a suburban Chicago firearms dealer. ATF and the Naperville Police Department led the probe, with assistance from the DuPage County Sheriff’s Office.

**Carjacking and Other Violent Crime Prosecutions**

“The U.S. Attorney’s Office works closely with federal, state, and local law enforcement officers to prosecute violent crimes, such as carjacking, that violate federal law,” said U.S. Attorney Lausch.

- A Chicago man was indicted last month on charges he carjacked a rideshare vehicle and fatally shot the driver. EDMOND HARRIS was also charged with an additional carjacking and attempted carjacking in connection with other incidents. JOSHUA WALKER, of Chicago, was charged with participating with Harris in one of the carjackings. The case was investigated by ATF, CPD, and the Oak Park Police Department.
- A Chicago man who carjacked a vehicle at gunpoint in the city’s Uptown neighborhood was sentenced in September to more than 12 years in prison on carjacking and firearm offenses. During the carjacking, MICHAEL C. PEARSON fired a pistol in the direction of a passenger of the vehicle. FBI and CPD investigated, with assistance from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office.
- A jury in September convicted JAMAR JARVIS, of Chicago, on carjacking and weapons offenses for carjacking a vehicle at gunpoint in the city’s Edgewater neighborhood. Jarvis is set to be sentenced next month. The probe was led by the FBI and CPD, with assistance from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office.
- KIAR EVANS, of Chicago, was arrested and charged this summer with firing a handgun while attempting to carjack a vehicle on the city’s West Side, and moments later carjacking another vehicle at gunpoint. FBI and CPD investigated.
- A Chicago man was charged in July with forcibly assaulting two ATF agents and an ATF Task Force officer. EUGENE MCLAURIN allegedly shot the officers as they were driving in an unmarked law enforcement vehicle while participating in a federal investigation on
the South Side of Chicago. ATF and CPD led the investigation into the shooting, with assistance from the Illinois State Police.

**Illegal Possession of Firearms Prosecutions**

“If you are a felon and thinking about picking up a gun in Chicago, you should expect to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and face the possibility of going to federal prison for a long time,” said U.S. Attorney Lausch.

- A federal jury this month convicted BRIAN STAFFORD, a felon from the Chicago suburb of Bellwood, on firearm and drug charges for **illegally possessing two loaded handguns** and dealing heroin and crack cocaine. A separate jury in 2019 convicted Stafford of illegally possessing three assault rifles. All of the handguns and rifles illegally possessed by Stafford were linked to thefts from a cargo train that passed through Chicago in September 2016. Stafford is awaiting sentencing. The case was investigated by FBI, with assistance from ATF, Cook County Sheriff’s Office, Evergreen Park, Ill., Police Department, and Bolingbrook, Ill., Police Department.

- DONTA BAKER, of Chicago, was sentenced this month to six years in federal prison for **illegally possessing a loaded handgun** on a street in the city’s West Englewood neighborhood. Baker had previously been convicted of multiple firearm-related felonies in state court and was prohibited by federal law from possessing a firearm. ATF and CPD conducted the investigation.

- TERRY LEE, of Chicago, was sentenced in August to six years in federal prison for **illegally possessing a stolen semi-automatic handgun in Douglas Park** on the city’s West Side. ATF and CPD conducted the probe.

- Convicted felon EDDIE JONES, of Chicago, was sentenced in August to eight years in prison for illegally possessing a loaded handgun in the city’s Humboldt Park neighborhood. The investigation revealed that three victims were wounded by gunfire moments before Chicago Police officers encountered and arrested Jones. In imposing the sentence, the judge found that Jones used the gun in the **attempted murders of the three wounded victims**. ATF and CPD investigated.

- In August, NICHOLAS WILLIAMS, of Chicago, was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for illegally possessing a loaded handgun on a sidewalk on the city’s Near North Side. The firearm was **equipped with an extended magazine and loaded with 22 rounds of ammunition**. Williams had previously been convicted of a firearm-related felony in state court. FBI and CPD investigated the case, with assistance from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office.

- A federal jury in August convicted DARIUS MORALES of **illegally possessing a semi-automatic handgun in north suburban Evanston** after Morales tried to flee from police
in a car and on foot. He faces up to ten years in prison when he is sentenced later this month. DEA led the investigation, with assistance from ATF, the Evanston Police Department, and the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office.

- A convicted felon who illegally possessed a loaded handgun during looting in downtown Chicago in the summer of 2020 was sentenced in July to 18 months in prison. During the investigation, law enforcement uncovered multiple social media postings by JAVONTE T. WILLIAMS, of Chicago, in which he boasted about looting stores in the city. ATF and CPD led the probe, with assistance from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office.

**Significant Drug Trafficking Prosecutions**

The U.S. Attorney’s Office targets traffickers who bring illegal drugs into Illinois from other states or countries, with a focus on organizations or individuals who use guns, violence, and threats of violence to protect and promote their illegal businesses. The U.S. Attorney’s Office works directly with the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office to ensure that individuals trafficking drugs are charged with appropriate offenses in either federal or state court.

Public safety is also being threatened by unprecedented levels of opioid misuse and overdose. Opioids are a class of highly addictive drugs that includes heroin, fentanyl, and prescription painkillers such as oxycodone and hydrocodone. U.S. Attorney Lausch in November 2019 created an Opioid Task Force for the purpose of combatting the growing number of unlawful distributions of controlled substances fueling the nation’s opioid crisis. This includes prosecuting the leaders of traditional drug trafficking organizations, as well as rogue healthcare providers, pharmacists, pharmacist technicians, and others who contribute to the misuse of opioids. “We are actively attacking the opioid crisis from all investigative and prosecutorial angles,” said U.S. Attorney Lausch.

- The leader of a drug trafficking organization was sentenced this month to 20 years in federal prison for supplying heroin to an illegal open-air market on the West Side of Chicago. LEVAUGHN COLLINS, of Chicago, obtained bulk quantities of heroin and provided it to numerous associates, who, at Collins’s direction, processed and packaged the drugs for street-level sales. DEA and CPD led the probe, with support from HIDTA and assistance from IRS-CI and the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office.

- Three individuals were arrested this month as part of a federal investigation that disrupted a suspected Mexico-to-Chicago drug pipeline and resulted in government seizures of a private plane and 100 kilograms of cocaine. The cocaine had allegedly been transported to the Chicago area on the plane from Toluca, Mexico, via Houston, Texas. DEA, HSI and IRS-CI are leading the probe, with assistance from CPD, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Indiana.
A joint federal and local investigation in the far north suburbs of Chicago resulted in drug or firearm charges in August against four individuals. The alleged trafficking of cocaine and methamphetamines occurred in Waukegan and Beach Park. ATF and the Lake County Sheriff’s Office investigated the case.

A woman vacationing in Chicago from Mexico was arrested here in July for allegedly selling two kilograms of cocaine to a buyer who, unbeknownst to the woman, was cooperating with law enforcement. According to the charges against MARINA RIVERA, law enforcement after the sale searched a home in the city’s Little Village neighborhood and discovered approximately eight kilograms of cocaine inside a suitcase in the bedroom where Rivera was staying. DEA investigated.

A federal indictment unsealed in June charged five defendants with conspiring to launder illicit drug proceeds in Chicago for more than a decade. The defendants allegedly laundered drug trafficking proceeds generated by the husbands of two of the defendants after the husbands were incarcerated on separate federal charges in 2008. The probe was led by DEA, IRS-CI and USPIS.

**COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

The PSN program continues to invest resources in violence-prevention initiatives. Members of the U.S. Attorney’s Office have participated in offender notification meetings and youth outreach forums. Even during the current COVID-19 pandemic, these meetings and forums are still being held, including in a virtual environment, to maintain the outreach to former offenders.

Offender notification meetings provide an opportunity for individuals who have been convicted of a state or federal offense to make an informed choice not to engage in further criminal activity. Researchers at Arizona State University found that the forums in Chicago have a positive influence on the offenders’ perception of police and help create an understanding that criminal activity results in a higher risk to return to prison. Researchers at Yale University found that ex-offenders who attend an offender notification meeting in Chicago are 30% less likely to commit a new offense than those who did not attend a meeting.

The quarterly youth forums assist teenagers to identify a path beyond criminal activity. The youth forums are conducted in partnership with CPD, the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, and local social service agencies.

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