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# **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **GUN VIOLENCE TASK FORCE ARRESTS FIVE MORE STRAW PURCHASERS**

### ***DEFENDANTS CHARGED WITH BUYING 20 GUNS AS STRAW PURCHASER***

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September 25, 2007----District Attorney Lynne Abraham, Attorney General Tom Corbett and Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson today announced that the Gun Violence Task Force has obtained arrest warrants for 5 more individuals involved in "Straw Purchasing" schemes to illegally traffic guns in Philadelphia. Over the past nine months, the Task Force has opened 280 investigations, made 77 arrests involving the illegal sale of 151 firearms, and seized 130 firearms including five AK-47s. Task Force investigators were instrumental in cracking a burglary ring operating in Montgomery County in which stolen firearms were brought to Philadelphia for sale on the street. They have also arrested several individuals involved in a scheme to illegally purchase and ship handguns overseas. In addition, the Task Force has assisted Philadelphia police in solving numerous shootings and at least one homicide.

In December 2006, with funding from the State Legislature and spearheaded by State Sen. Vincent Fumo, District Attorney Lynne Abraham and Attorney General Tom Corbett launched the Gun Violence Task Force to attack the proliferation of illegal guns on city streets. Composed of veteran investigators and seasoned prosecutors, and working in close coordination with the Philadelphia Police Department, the Task Force began operations in Southwest Philadelphia and has since expanded into all six of the city's police Divisions. With the assistance of this same state funding, the Philadelphia Police Department has begun to expand the number of trained Firearms Examiners and to modernize its Firearms Identification Unit facilities located at 843-845 North 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The funding has not only allowed the Department to purchase much needed equipment, but also to institute 6-month, 12-month, and 18-month training programs which when completed next summer, will more than quadruple the number of fully qualified examiners available to investigate firearms offenses in our city.

“Not only can a ‘Straw Purchaser’ be charged with illegally buying the gun for the felon. In certain circumstances, a ‘Straw Purchaser’ may also be held criminally as well as civilly liable for crimes subsequently committed with that gun” said Abraham. “We are committed to prevent people engaging in this deadly scheme, and we will prosecute to the fullest extent of the law.”

“The message that we are sending with these arrests is clear: we are aggressively investigating and prosecuting straw purchasers, and we are committed to stemming the tide of gun violence in Philadelphia,” said Corbett.

"The Philadelphia Police Department is committed to working with the District Attorney's Office and the Attorney General's Office to eliminate illegal guns from our streets," said Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson. "This cooperative effort is extremely crucial to getting illegal guns off the streets of Philadelphia."

The magnitude of the city's gun trafficking problem is staggering:

- In 2006, police recovered 5400 guns in Philadelphia.
- Yet in 2006, 2004 people were shot on city streets.
  
- In 2007 to date, police have recovered more than 3000 guns.
- In 2007 to date, 1268 people have been shot.

Under Pennsylvania law, a convicted felon is prohibited from purchasing a firearm. Often, felons hire “Straws”, citizens with no criminal record, to purchase guns for them. The “Straw”, after buying the gun and delivering it to the felon, frequently reports the gun as stolen in an attempt to avoid criminal responsibility when the gun is later used in a crime. Today's warrants charge the illegal purchase of 20 handguns.

Arrest warrants have been issued for the following:

**Betsy Lebron**, 41, of the 300 block of East Tusculum Street, Kensington. It is alleged that Lebron acted as a straw purchaser of 7 firearms. On 12/18/98, Lebron purchased a .25 caliber handgun and a .380 caliber handgun. The .380 was recovered by Philadelphia police on 7/27/99 from a male named Michael Dowling. The .25 caliber has not been recovered. On 12/26/98, Lebron purchased a .32 caliber handgun which was recovered by police on 4/13/03 from a male named Jose Molina. On 12/31/98, Lebron purchased a .380 caliber handgun which was recovered by Philadelphia police on 11/10/99 from a male named Keith Conde. On 3/15/00, Lebron purchased a 9mm handgun which was recovered by Philadelphia police on 9/28/04 from a male named David Price. On 5/16/00, Lebron purchased a .380 caliber handgun which has not been recovered. On 4/20/01, Lebron purchased a .22 caliber handgun which also has not been recovered. Lebron is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111, False Statements in Connection with a Firearms Purchase, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree (7 counts); 18 PA.C.S. 4911, Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the third degree (7 counts); 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree (7 counts); and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree.

**Timothy Rasheen Goode**, 29, of the 2000 block of N 23rd street, North Philadelphia. Goode is charged with illegally purchasing 3 firearms. On 7/29/05, Goode purchased a .32 caliber handgun which he reported stolen on 11/3/05. On 5/19/06, Goode purchased a 9mm handgun which he reported stolen on 1/8/07. On 5/12/07, Goode purchased a

.380 caliber handgun which was not reported lost or stolen but was recovered from a convicted felon on 7/7/07. Goode is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111 (g)(4), False Statements in Connection with a Firearms Purchase, a felony of the 3rd degree (3 counts); 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree (3 counts); 18 PA.C.S. 4911(a) (1), Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree (3 counts); 18 PA.C.S. 4906, False Reports to Law Enforcement, a misdemeanor of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree.

**Romeka Johnson**, 26, of the 4500 block of N. Hurley Street, Feltonville. Johnson is accused of straw purchasing a 9 mm handgun for her boyfriend, a convicted felon on 6/30/07. Police recovered the loaded handgun from the boyfriend's rented vehicle on 8/22/07 during a car stop. Johnson is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111(g) (4), False Statements in Connection with a Firearms Purchase, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree; 18 PA.C.S. 6111(g) (2), Transfer of a Firearm to an Ineligible Person, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4911(a) (1), Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree.

**Anthony Becton**, 21, of the 2400 block of N. Carlisle Street, North Philadelphia. It is alleged that on 4/19/07, Becton purchased a 9mm handgun for his 20-year old cousin because his cousin was too young to buy the gun himself. Becton later reported the gun stolen on 8/8/07. He is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111(g) (4) False Statements in Connection with a Firearms Purchase, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4911(a), Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the third degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4906, False Reports to Law Enforcement, a misdemeanor of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree..

**Donayle Andrews**, 39, of the 4100 block of Parkside Avenue, West Philadelphia. It is alleged that Andrews purchased 8 handguns using fraudulent identification. Two of the handguns have been recovered by police: one as result of a car stop on I-95, the other by DEA agents in the course of an investigation. The warrant for Andrews is the result of a joint investigation conducted by the Task Force, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and the Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Investigation. Andrews is charged with violations of 18 PA.C.S. 6111(g) (4), False Statements in Connection with a Firearms Purchase, a felony of the 3rd degree (8 counts); 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4911(a) (1), Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree (8 counts); and 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree (8 counts).

Felonies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree are punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment and a \$25,000 fine. Felonies of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree are punishable by up to 7 years imprisonment and a \$15,000 fine. Misdemeanors of the 1<sup>st</sup> degree are punishable by up to 5 years imprisonment and a \$10,000 fine. Misdemeanors of the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree are punishable by up to 2 years imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine. Misdemeanors of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree are punishable by up to 1 year imprisonment and a \$2,500 fine. Conviction of more than one count of 18 PA.C.S.A 6111 is a Felony of the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree and carries a **mandatory** sentence of five to 10 years imprisonment and a \$25,000 fine.

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