



LYNNE ABRAHAM
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
THREE SOUTH PENN SQUARE
CORNER OF JUNIPER AND SOUTH
PENN SQUARE
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107**

NEWS RELEASE

Date: August 12, 2008
Contact: Cathie Abookire / 215-686-8711
Director of Communications

TWO ILLEGAL GUN TRAFFICKERS SENTENCED TO STATE PRISON

Gun Violence Task Force Continues Arresting and Prosecuting Straw Purchasers

August 12, 2008----District Attorney Lynne Abraham, Attorney General Tom Corbett and Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey today announced that two illegal gun traffickers prosecuted by the Gun Violence Task Force have been sentenced to state prison.

“Straw purchasers beware,” said District Attorney Lynne Abraham. “This is you.”

Semaj Marshall, DOB 10/28/1982, of the 1500-block of South Stillman St., a first-offender straw purchaser, pled guilty Monday August 11, 2008 to two counts of violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111(g)(4), False Statements During a Firearms Transaction) and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy. Judge Susan Schulman immediately imposed a sentence of 4-10 years state incarceration. An investigation was initiated by agents of the Gun Violence Task Force after a gun that was purchased by Marshall was recovered by police in connection with a gun point robbery. Task Force Special Agents then developed evidence proving that Marshall had acted as a straw purchaser for a local drug dealer.

Lokell Berthan, DOB 12/28/1987, of the 1600-block of Benner St., pled guilty and was sentenced on August 7, 2008 by Judge Schulman to 3-6 years of state incarceration for violation of 18 PA.C.S. 6106, Illegal Possession of a Firearm. Berthan was attempting to illegally sell a 9mm handgun on the street when he accidentally shot himself in the groin. Police followed Berthan's vehicle, which was traveling at a high rate of speed, to Frankford Hospital. A search warrant was subsequently executed on the Berthan's car; and police recovered two firearms and ammunition, as well as various items that could be

used in armed robberies including two black knit hoods, a black hooded sweatshirt, a box of latex gloves, two ski masks and a duffel bag.

“With nearly 200 arrests, the task force is making an impact on reducing violence in Philadelphia.” said Attorney General Tom Corbett.

Since it began in December 2006, the Gun Violence Task Force has opened 674 investigations involving the illegal transfer of firearms, made 195 arrests, and seized 312 firearms. In addition, the Task Force has assisted Philadelphia police in solving numerous shootings, burglaries, and homicides.

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.

Under Pennsylvania law, a convicted felon is prohibited from purchasing a firearm. Licensed gun dealers require proof of identity and perform a record check prior to making a sale. Unable to legally purchase firearms from a licensed dealer, felons use false identification or 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. Felons also illegally purchase weapons “on the street” - most often guns stolen in burglaries.