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NEWS RELEASE

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GUN VIOLENCE TASK FORCE CHARGES NINE MORE PEOPLE WITH THE ILLEGAL TRANSFER OF 28 MORE GUNS

*Task Force Has Opened 500 Investigations, Arrested 121 People and Seized 240
Firearms All Connected to 'Straw Purchases'*

February 19, 2008-----District Attorney Lynne Abraham, Attorney General Tom Corbett and Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey today announced that the Gun Violence Task Force has charged nine more individuals with the illegal transfer of 28 handguns. Since it began in December 2006, the Task Force has opened over 500 investigations involving the illegal transfer of firearms, made 121 arrests, and seized 240 firearms. In addition, the Task Force has assisted Philadelphia police in solving numerous shootings, burglaries, 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.

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 purchase firearms from a licensed dealer, felons illegally purchase weapons "on the street" 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. Guns taken in residential burglaries are yet another source of crime guns.

It was announced today that the following have been arrested:

William Catanch, 29, of the 2000 block of Pickwick Street. It is alleged that Catanch straw purchased two .45 caliber handguns at a gun show for a convicted drug dealer, Michael Welles, who was subsequently arrested by ATF for weapons offenses. Catanch is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111, Illegal Transfer of Firearms, a felony of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4911, Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 2nd degree.

Theresa Jones, 44, of the 1500 block of Hemberger Way. It is alleged that on two separate occasions, Jones went to a gun shop with different males and straw purchased handguns. One of the handguns, a 9mm, was recovered by police during the arrest of Raymond Hainey, a convicted felon, who pulled the loaded weapon on police as he was being arrested. Jones is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111, Illegal Transfer of Firearms, a felony of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4911, Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 2nd degree.

Michael McLaughlin, 27, of the 4300 block of Deveraux Street. It is alleged that McLaughlin legally purchased two handguns, one .45 caliber and one 9mm, which he then illegally sold. The .45 caliber handgun was later confiscated from Luis Colon, a convicted drug dealer, by Philadelphia Narcotics officers serving a search warrant. McLaughlin is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111, Illegal Transfer of Firearms, a felony of the 2nd degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 2nd degree.

Vito Baldini, 29, of the 6400 block of Woodcrest Avenue. It is alleged that Baldini legally purchased 3 handguns, one 9mm, one .32 caliber, and one .40 caliber which he later illegally sold. None of the handguns have been recovered. Baldini is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111 and 6115, Illegal Transfer of Firearms, felonies of the 2nd degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 2nd degree.

Jason Goldwire, 31, of the 1500 block of S. Hicks Street. It is alleged that Goldwire straw purchased 3 handguns, one .40 caliber, one .357 magnum, and another .357 caliber for two different individuals. He is also charged with illegally transferring a 4th handgun, a 9mm, which was recovered by Philadelphia Narcotics Officers while serving a Search Warrant which led to the arrest of Edward Green, a convicted felon. Goldwire is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111 and 6115, Illegal Transfer of Firearms, felonies of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4911, Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 2nd degree.

David Shakir Williams aka Yasir Ali, 25, of the 1900 block of S. Juniper Street. It is alleged that Williams illegally sold 5 handguns on the street. One, a .45 caliber, was recovered by Philadelphia Narcotics officers in the arrest of Shakir Lawrence, a convicted drug dealer. Another, a 9mm, was also recovered by Philadelphia police in connection with the arrest of Eric Miller, a convicted murderer. Williams is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111, Illegal Transfer of Firearms, a felony of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree; and 18 PA.C.S. 4911, Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree

Scott Alessandrino, 38, of the 6500 block of Cobbs Creek Parkway. It is alleged that Alessandrino entered a residence in Southwest Philadelphia without permission and stole 2 handguns, one .357 and one 9mm which he subsequently sold illegally. Neither gun has been recovered. Alessandrino is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 3502, Burglary, a felony of the first degree; 18 PA.C.S. 3503, Criminal Trespass, a felony of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 3921, Theft by Unlawful Taking; and 18 PA.C.S. 3925, Theft by Receiving Stolen Property, a felony of the 3rd degree.

Fatima Butler, 28, of the 5900 block of N. Leithgow Street. It is alleged that Butler straw purchased 4 handguns for her husband, David Price, a convicted felon. One of the handguns was recovered by Philadelphia police from Anthony Washington, a convicted drug dealer. Another was recovered by Philadelphia police from Aswad Newkirk, a convicted felon. A third was recovered along with narcotics by Camden police during a car stop. Butler is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111, Illegal Transfer of Firearms, a felony of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4911, Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 2nd degree.

In addition, an arrest warrant has been issued for Sharee Bostic, 24, of the 6700 block of Woodlawn Avenue. It is alleged that Bostic straw purchased 4 handguns for Michael Grant who is presently awaiting trial for an armed carjacking in which he shot at pursuing police officers. One of Bostic's handguns, a .40 caliber, was recovered (loaded) from the person of Muneer Simmons by Philadelphia Narcotics Officers while serving a search warrant. Bostic is charged with violating 18 PA.C.S. 6111, Illegal Transfer of Firearms, a felony of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4904, Unsworn Falsification, a misdemeanor of the 2nd degree; 18 PA.C.S. 4911, Tampering with Public Records or Information, a felony of the 3rd degree and 18 PA.C.S. 903, Conspiracy, a felony of the 2nd degree.

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