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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FOUR BALTIMORE MEN INDICTED IN
MURDER-FOR-HIRE SCHEME AND DRUG CONSPIRACY**

Baltimore, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that a federal grand jury has indicted Solothal Thomas, age 28, his brother Danta Thomas, age 33, Edward Countess, age 28, and Linwood Smith, all of Baltimore, Maryland, for crimes arising from their participation in a drug conspiracy and a 2001 murder-for-hire in Baltimore County.

The six-count indictment unsealed today charges that on October 2, 2001, Solothal Thomas, known by the street name of "Itchy-Man," and Countess, with assistance from Danta Thomas and Smith, shot and killed Jesse Williams, then age 33, in the 8200 block of Courtland Manor Road in Baltimore County. According to the indictment, the four defendants were paid a total of approximately \$10,000 for their roles in Williams' murder.

The indictment also charges that from at least 2001 through the summer of 2003, the defendants were members of a marijuana-distribution conspiracy in Baltimore and that they acted as "enforcers" for the conspiracy, committing acts of violence to help protect the organization's dominant position and to retaliate against and intimidate individuals who interfered with the organization's operations. The indictment alleges that the Williams murder was committed in

furtherance of that conspiracy.

All four defendants are charged with conspiracy to distribute narcotics and with conspiracy to possess a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime or a crime of violence. Solothal Thomas, Danta Thomas and Countess are also charged with committing a murder-for-hire, possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime or crime of violence resulting in death, and related offenses.

“This indictment is a result of our continued commitment to dismantle violent drug organizations in Baltimore City,” stated United States Attorney Thomas M. DiBiagio.

Solothal and Dante Thomas have been taken into federal custody and their initial appearances are scheduled for 3:30 p.m. today before United States Magistrate Judge James K. Bredar. Countess will be transferred from state to federal custody, and Smith is currently being sought.

The maximum penalty for narcotics conspiracy and conspiracy to possess a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime or crime of violence is life in prison. The murder-for-hire charge and the charge of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime or violent crime resulting in death both carry a maximum possible penalty of death.

An indictment is not a finding of guilt. An individual charged by indictment is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty at some later criminal proceedings.

The criminal charges in this indictment are the result of a joint investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Baltimore City Police Department; the Baltimore County Police Department; the Baltimore County State’s Attorney’s Office; and the United States Attorney’s Office. The U.S. Marshals Service also assisted in the apprehension of the defendants. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Jason M. Weinstein and Paul M.

Tiao.