



U.S. Department of Justice

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**LOCAL OFFICIALS TEAM UP WITH NATIONAL LEADERSHIP
TO REDUCE GUN CRIME IN OUR COMMUNITY;
PLYMOUTH COUNTY DA'S OFFICE WINS NATIONAL AWARD**

***Federal Gun Crime Prosecutions Hit Record Highs,
While Violent Crime Rate Hits 30-Year Low***

Boston, MA – The national Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) conference met this week in Kansas City, Missouri and included a delegation from Massachusetts, comprised of federal and state law enforcement, federal and state prosecutors, probation, the Massachusetts PSN criminal research partner from Northeastern University and the Massachusetts PSN media outreach partner, Stop Handgun Violence. Attorney General John Ashcroft spoke to over 1,150 federal, state, and local prosecutors, law enforcement officials, community leaders, and other members of the PSN teams from across the nation who came together to discuss efforts to reduce and prosecute gun crime. PSN is President Bush's comprehensive initiative to combat gun crime in America by providing locally-based programs with the tools and resources they need to succeed. Plymouth County District Attorney Timothy Cruz's Office received the "Outstanding Local Prosecutor's Award" at this year's conference. District Attorney Cruz's office was selected from among all the state prosecutor's office in the country.

"Through Project Safe Neighborhood's unprecedented partnership of state, local and federal leaders, we are turning the tide on gun crime," said Attorney General John Ashcroft. "We are taking gun-wielding criminals off our streets. The last three years represent a record of great success, but working together, we can do even more to make our neighborhoods safe."

"Prosecuting felons who carry and use guns, saves lives," stated U.S. Attorney Michael Sullivan. "Working with our state and local partners, we have used firearms and drug related prosecutions successfully in cities such as Boston, Lawrence and Brockton to disrupt violent gangs and to remove dangerous individuals from neighborhoods. We are committed to using all of the tools available to us to improve the quality of life in areas plagued by violence."

Federal Gun Crime Prosecutions Have Increased Significantly Every Year Under Project Safe Neighborhoods. From FY 2000 to FY 2003, federal firearms prosecutions increased by 68%. In FY 2003, the Justice Department filed over 10,500 federal firearms

cases—the highest number ever recorded by the Department. The number of defendants charged with federal gun crimes rose from approximately 10,600 to over 13,000 from FY 2002 to FY 2003, a record increase of almost 23%. These figures are the highest on record in a single year since the Department began recording this information. In FY 2003, nearly all — 93% — of convicted defendants, who were originally charged with federal firearms offenses, were sentenced to some time in prison for convictions on firearms charges or other charges. 72% were sentenced to more than three years in prison, and over half of all defendants convicted were sentenced to more than five years in federal prison. State and local prosecutions have also increased.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Is Working In Massachusetts Communities. U.S. Attorney Sullivan, working side by side with state and local law enforcement, prosecutors and other community leaders, has created a PSN strategy to fit the unique gun crime problem in Massachusetts. Criminals who use guns are prosecuted under federal, state, or local laws, depending on which jurisdiction can provide the most appropriate punishment. As a result of these efforts, federal gun prosecutions in Massachusetts more than doubled in 2002 and 2003 which saw 70 and 68 gun prosecutions respectively from 33 gun prosecutions brought in both 2000 and 2001.

At this year's conference, the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office was presented with the "Outstanding Local Prosecutor's Office" award by Attorney General Ashcroft. The Plymouth County District Attorney's Office, under the leadership of District Attorney Timothy Cruz, was recognized for its extraordinary contributions to the PSN effort in Massachusetts. Following a significant increase in gun violence in Brockton in 2002, the DA's Office worked hard to improve its largely active PSN program. The DA's Office assigned two prosecutors to handle firearms-related cases in Superior and District courts. They worked with the U.S. Attorney's Office to develop a firearms task force comprised of federal and state prosecutors; federal, state, and local law enforcement officers; and parole and juvenile probation officials to monitor gun crime and to plan strategies to deal with increased levels of gun violence. They worked with the Brockton Police Department to create a five-person undercover "Impact Shift" to focus on hot spot areas. They fast-tracked gun prosecutions and prioritized cases involving individuals involved in gang or gun violence. They combined their PSN program with their Weed and Seed initiative, resulting in more focused prevention and intervention activities. One of those projects, the Ceasefire program, reaches out to juveniles and young adults at high risk of becoming involved in firearm-related activity to provide them with information about the strict penalties for gun crimes under state and federal law and offer services and opportunities for positive change. The DA's Office contacted the father of a young man who was murdered as a result of gang violence and invited him to become a part of the Ceasefire program. His compelling presentation reaches many young people who are otherwise difficult to engage.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Has Contributed to Decreasing the Violent Crime Rate to Its Lowest Levels in 30 Years, But Reducing Gun Crime Remains an Important Goal. The violent crime rate is now at its lowest level since 1973, when the Justice Department's

Bureau of Justice Statistics started collecting criminal victimization data. The violent crime rate for the first two years of the Bush Administration (2001-2002) was nearly 21% lower than for 1999-2000. The per capita number of violent crimes *involving firearms* has dropped 14% in 2001-2002, from 1999-2000. There were approximately 64,000 fewer gun crimes and approximately 12% (almost 130,000) fewer victims of gun crime in 2001-2002, than in 1999-2000.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Takes a Multifaceted Approach to Reducing Gun Crime. Gun crime reduction is President Bush's top domestic criminal justice initiative, and the Bush Administration has devoted over \$1 billion to Project Safe Neighborhoods in its first four years (FY 2001 to FY 2004). The funds have been used to hire new federal, state, and local prosecutors, provide training, hire research and community outreach support, and develop and promote effective prevention and deterrence efforts. Each of the 94 federal judicial districts engages in deterrence and prevention efforts through community outreach and media campaigns and ensures that law enforcement and prosecutors have the training they need.

The PSN conference is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice. To find out more about PSN and its local programs, visit the PSN website at www.psn.gov.

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