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August 15, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**LEEANDER BLAKE SENTENCED TO LIFE IN
2002 ANNAPOLIS CARJACKING AND MURDER**

Federal Prosecution Followed State's Unsuccessful Appeal to U.S. Supreme Court

Baltimore, Maryland - U.S. District Judge William M. Nickerson sentenced Leeander Jerome Blake, age 22, of the Robinwood area in Annapolis, Maryland, today to: life in prison for first degree murder and carjacking; 20 years in prison for conspiracy to possess firearms, concurrent to the life sentence; and ten years in prison for possession and discharge of a firearm in furtherance of a violent crime, consecutive to the life sentence, announced United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein. The charges were related to the carjacking and murder of Straughan Lee Griffin on September 19, 2002.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein said, "Leeander Blake will spend the rest of his life in federal prison for the brutal carjacking and murder of Straughan Lee Griffin. By demonstrating how local, state and federal authorities in Maryland work together to achieve justice, we hope that this case will deter violent criminals and reassure law-abiding citizens. Mr. Griffin's family and friends, who resolutely attended many proceedings in state and federal courtrooms, have seen both of his killers brought to justice.

ATF Special Agent in Charge Gregory K. Gant stated, "This investigation is a clear example of how law enforcement, through interagency cooperation, will not cease to put violent offenders in jail, so that the victims and their families can finally feel a true sense that justice has been served.

Special Agent in Charge (SAC) William D. Chase of the Baltimore Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation stated, "We, along with our law enforcement partners, will continue to address the violent crime in Maryland. Leeander Blake has now been held accountable for his violent criminal actions, and justice has been served for the citizens of Maryland, particularly the family of Mr. Straughan Lee Griffin."

Anne Arundel County State's Attorney Frank R. Weathersbee said, "We applaud the U.S. Attorney's Office for their efforts in bringing this case to justice - a case where justice was long overdue."

According to the evidence presented at trial, on September 19, 2002, Blake and his

neighbor, Terrance Tolbert, carjacked a 2000 Jeep Grand Cherokee owned by Straughan Lee Griffin, age 51, of Annapolis. In the course of the carjacking, which took place in front of Mr. Griffin's home in the Historic District of Annapolis, Mr. Griffin was shot to death in the head and run over by the Jeep Cherokee as they fled. Testimony at the trial showed that on the evening of September 19, 2002, Blake and Tolbert agreed to commit a carjacking as they walked through downtown Annapolis and that prior to confronting Mr. Griffin in front of his Cumberland Court home, Blake and Tolbert targeted and approached several other potential victims on Maryland Avenue. In a post-arrest statement on October 26, 2002 while in state custody, Blake admitted to an Annapolis police detective that he and Mr. Tolbert had planned to commit a carjacking robbery. Blake also admitted that he pointed Mr. Griffin out to Tolbert as a robbery target, but denied that he was the shooter.

The United States Attorney's Office opened a federal investigation in November 2005 after the United States Supreme Court declined to review a pretrial ruling by the Maryland Court of Appeals that Blake's post-arrest statement was inadmissible in state court. Under then-existing state law which has since been changed, the Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's Office was required to dismiss the murder and carjacking charges against Blake without presenting evidence to a jury. Trial in the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County proceeded against Tolbert, who was convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment without parole, plus 30 years.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein praised the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and Annapolis Police Department for their investigative work. Mr. Rosenstein also thanked the Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's Office and the Maryland Attorney General's Office for their valuable assistance. Mr. Rosenstein commended Assistant U.S. Attorneys John Purcell and Michael Hanlon, who are prosecuting the case.