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NEWS RELEASE

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NEODESHA, KANSAS, MAN CONVICTED OF MULTIPLE ROBBERIES, CAR JACKING, AND GUN CHARGES

WICHITA, Kan. – United States Attorney Eric Melgren announced that **Maurice Franklin, Jr.**, 30, Neodesha, Kansas, was convicted on September 8, 2004, in U.S. District Court in Wichita, Kansas, following a six day jury trial. Franklin was convicted of three counts of robbery, three counts of using a firearm during a robbery; two counts of being a felon in possession of a firearm or ammunition; one count of car jacking; and one count of using a firearm during a car jacking. The jury was unable to reach a verdict on the three counts relating to the Carlos O’Kelly Mexican Restaurant robbery in Topeka, Kansas. No decision has yet been made on whether these counts will be retried.

Evidence presented at trial established that on March 11, 2002, at approximately 7:45 p.m., Franklin knocked on the door of a residence in Independence, Kansas, that was the home of a man, woman and two small children. Franklin, wearing a mask and carrying a handgun, forced his way into the home and took the man at gunpoint from his home. Franklin had the man drive his van to Independence High School where Franklin threatened to kill the man. The man jumped from his moving van and ran into the high school where Franklin shot the man in the leg. Franklin was also convicted of robbing the Taco Inn, Independence, Kansas, on March 9, 2002, the Braum’s, Independence, Kansas, on April 30, 2003, and the Kentucky Fried Chicken, Coffeyville, Kansas, on May 8, 2003.

Franklin faces a maximum of twenty years in federal prison, without parole, on each count of robbery; a minimum of five years on the first count of using a firearm during a robbery and a minimum of twenty-five years for each additional count of using a firearm during a robbery; a maximum of ten years for each count of being a felon in possession of ammunition or a firearm; a maximum of fifteen years for car jacking and a minimum of twenty-five years for using a firearm during a car jacking. Franklin’s use of a firearm during the robberies and the car jacking could result in a sentence of 80 years for these charges, which will run consecutive to the sentence imposed for the underlying convictions. No sentencing date has yet been set.

Franklin was charged under **Project Safe Neighborhoods**, a national initiative to reduce gun violence in our communities. Project Safe Neighborhoods is a top priority of the Department of Justice and the United States Attorney's office in Kansas, second only to the fight against terrorism.

“The goal of Project Safe Neighborhoods is to target violent offenders who cause a disproportionate level of firearm related violence and prosecute them under federal gun violation laws which carry stiff, mandatory prison sentences,” Melgren said. “This case is exactly the type of situation the President and Attorney General were contemplating when Project Safe Neighborhoods was instituted in 2001. As a result of today's verdict, a man who terrorized the communities of Topeka, Coffeyville, and Independence has been removed from the streets. The residents of these communities should feel safer tonight. By removing violent offenders such as Maurice Franklin from the streets, Project Safe Neighborhoods has made our communities safer places to live.”

Melgren commended the excellent work of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Topeka Police Department, the Parsons, Kansas Police Department, the Independence, Kansas Police Department, and the Coffeyville, Kansas Police Department in this investigation and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Matt Treaster and Alan Metzger in this prosecution.

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