



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**U.S. ATTORNEYS FOR KANSAS AND WESTERN MISSOURI
LAUNCH "PROJECT FELON" AGAINST CRIMINALS WITH GUNS
IN KCK, KCMO AND INDEPENDENCE**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - Steve Hill, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, and Jackie Williams, United States Attorney for the District of Kansas, today announced a new multi-agency effort designed to reduce violent crime, drug crimes and illegal firearms trafficking in the Kansas City metro area through aggressive federal prosecutions of felons with guns and criminals who use guns in drug dealing or violent crimes.

"**Project Felon**," which will target criminals with guns in the city limits of Kansas City, Kan., and Kansas City and Independence, Mo., is the local response to an order issued to the nation's U.S. Attorneys by Attorney General Janet Reno earlier this year., Hill and William said.

"Each U.S. Attorney was directed to review his or her current local initiatives against violent crime and illegal firearms trafficking to see if they could be improved or expanded," Williams said. "The idea was to be sure that all available law enforcement resources were being used in the best possible way to drive down the numbers of gun-related crimes."

By coincidence, the Kansas City Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms was already working on a study of approximately 1,000 criminal incidents occurring in 1998 in the Kansas City metro in which a firearm was present. The ATF's tracing study and its findings, combined with a closer look at local crime statistics and some discussions among law enforcement, became the springboard for us to launch Project Felon," Hill said.

The ATF's research showed that most of the 1,000 incidents studied involved unlawful gun possession (29 percent of cases), drugs (28.9 percent) or some type of violent act (20.6 percent); that almost half of the guns recovered (48 percent) were from offenders age 24 or younger; and that a significant number of the guns (42 percent) came from out-of-state.

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U.S. Attorney Hill said that representatives of his office and ATF concluded from the tracing study that many of the criminal incidents could be referred to federal authorities for prosecution in federal court, where federal laws and sentencing guidelines can, in many cases, provide stronger punishments than those available under state court systems.

"Operating on the theory that stronger punishment provides a stronger deterrent to crime, our hope is that **Project Felon** will not only remove dangerous criminals from our streets, but it will also send a message to other criminals that having and using guns will only add to their time behind bars," U.S. Attorney Williams said.

Project Felon will encourage state and local police and sheriffs departments whose jurisdictions cover the two Kansas Cities and Independence to refer cases to the respective U.S. Attorneys' offices for federal prosecution, primarily under two specific statutes:

* **Possession of any firearm or ammunition by a convicted felon.** (Title 18, United States Code, Section 922(g).) A possible maximum sentence of 10 years without parole maybe imposed if it is proven that a defendant has been convicted of a crime punishable by a term exceeding one year; that the defendant thereafter knowingly possessed a firearm; and that at some time prior to the defendant's possession of the firearm, the firearm was transported across a state line (to include being manufactured out-of-state).

* **Using or carrying or possessing a firearm during a crime of violence or a drug trafficking crime.** (Title 18, United States Code, Section 924(c).) A mandatory sentence of five years without parole (or a mandatory sentence of 20 years without parole for a second offense) will be imposed if it is proven that a defendant committed a crime of violence or a drug trafficking crime; and that during or in relation to or in furtherance of that crime, the defendant knowingly carried, used or possessed a firearm.

Project Felon will also put relevant information about targeted defendants in the hands of local law enforcement and county prosecutors so that they can address those criminal matters that may be beyond the scope of federal law, Hill and Williams said.

"We're not talking about enacting any new laws or hiring any new officers or expanding any budgets that ultimately have to be paid for by all of us as taxpayers," Hill said. "We're really just talking about law enforcement agencies sharing more information and decisions, and by doing that, to be working smarter, not just harder."

Agencies participating in **Project Felon** will review the initiative's preliminary results in about six months, the two U.S. Attorneys said. Results will initially be measured by a combination of arrest and prosecution statistics, but eventually, also by a review of crime rates.

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A more conclusive measurement of **Project Felon's** impact will take at least a full year, allowing time for the FBI to gather routine data for its annual Unified Crime Report (UCR), Hill and Williams said.

"Our work has already begun, and we are optimistic that a year or so from today we will be able to deliver a report card that shows our work has made a difference in the quality of life across the metro area,' Hill said.

A related phase of **Project Felon** will involve the use of public and private community-based social service agencies and neighborhood coalitions to focus on the prevention of gun violence, Williams said. "We're fortunate that we have so many extraordinary resources in the Kansas City metropolitan area to be our partners in this initiative," Williams said. "It's vital that we have that kind of broad-based support to help educate and inform the community and respond to the needs that law enforcement can't address on its own."

The primary law enforcement agencies currently participating in **Project Felon** are:

Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department
Kansas City, Kansas, Police Department
Independence, Missouri, Police Department
Jackson County, Missouri Prosecuting Attorney's Office
Wyandotte County, Kansas, Prosecuting Attorney's Office
Missouri Department of Corrections
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
Federal Bureau of Investigation
U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration
U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Kansas
U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Missouri
Operation Weed and Seed of Kansas City, Missouri
Operation Weed and Seed of Independence, Missouri
Kansas City Crime Commission

Additional law enforcement agencies are expected to join **Project Felon** as the initiative gets further underway, Hill and Williams said.
