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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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28 Members of Duluth Drug Ring Indicted

Duluth - Twenty-eight people from the Duluth area have been indicted on federal charges related to the possession and distribution of cocaine and crack cocaine. At a press conference in Duluth earlier today, United States Attorney Rachel K. Paulose and Special Agent in Charge B.J. Zapor of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives reported that the sixty-nine-count indictment, which was filed on July 19, had been unsealed following the arrest of 25 of the named defendants. Those arrests occurred primarily yesterday during a day-long, multi-agency, law enforcement operation in and around Duluth.

U.S. Attorney Paulose called the arrests “good news for the citizens of Duluth. Because of yesterday’s round-up, the residents here will rest more peacefully tonight. As with the fourteen-defendant indictment last month involving a drug dealing organization in Faribault, the message today is that drug dealers who think they can avoid federal prosecution by setting up shop in greater Minnesota are mistaken.”

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According to federal search warrants filed in the case, law enforcement officers in the Duluth area have been involved in the investigation of this cocaine and crack cocaine distribution ring for the last two years. Allegedly, Bernard Vann, the owner of Hot Gear Cold Grills & Beauty Supply, located on First Street in Duluth, was the head of the ring and the drug supplier for more than thirty distributors. Moreover, Vann allegedly used his store as a front for criminal activity, including the distribution of cocaine and crack cocaine. Investigators contend that over the past two to three years, this drug ring has been responsible for the sale and distribution of between forty and sixty kilograms of cocaine and crack cocaine in the Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin, areas, making it one of the region's largest known drug operations to date.

The indictment in this case states that between December 1, 2005, and July 16, 2007, the defendants knowingly and intentionally conspired to possess and distribute cocaine and crack cocaine. Specifically, the indictment and supporting search warrants allege that approximately nine grams of crack cocaine was sold by Bernard Vann on April 9, 2007, through a controlled buy that investigators had arranged. On April 19, 2007, another controlled buy allegedly resulted in the sale of approximately twenty-seven grams of crack by Bernard Vann and Jennifer Rosaylce Mincey, while a sale by the same two individuals on April 25, 2007, involved fifty-nine grams, and a sale by them on May 4, 2007, involved sixty-one grams of the drug.

In addition, Fredrick Demond Watts, Travion Edward Davis, Chaz Michael Legore, Felicia Marie Mason, Antwon Bernard Williams, Aldrea Lane Siler, Theodore Wright, and Carrie Jo Farrell are each charged in the indictment with a single count of crack distribution; while Tyrell Martell Beckom, Francisco James Bell, Kevin Wadell Moffitt, Robert Kennedy Price, and Tracey Ann Clark

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are each facing two counts of distributing cocaine or crack cocaine. Clarence James Beloch, Angelo M. Castleman, Quincy Jonathan Mason, and Lavioris Jerry Robinson are each charged with three counts of distributing crack cocaine; while Sidney Jermaine Boyd, Amy Lynn Legore, and Jabari Omar Samuel are each charged with selling cocaine or crack cocaine on four separate occasions. Christopher Gray is charged with five counts of crack distribution, while Makenzie Lynn Ann Eggersgluess and Roynell Taylor are each facing six charges of distribution of the drug. Finally, Darryl Lajoune Brown allegedly sold the drug on seven separate occasions, as did Sinatra Andrea Peters.

Following yesterday's arrest, ATF Special Agent in Charge Zapor said, "The law enforcement leaders in northern Minnesota had a vision of cooperation that allowed the involved agencies to dismantle this crime ring and make the Duluth twin ports a safer place for everyone."

In a separate but related indictment, unsealed earlier today, Machael Laman Hill was charged with one count of possession with the intent to distribute crack cocaine.

Any defendant convicted of conspiracy to distribute fifty grams or more of crack cocaine will face a maximum potential sentence of life in prison. The same maximum potential sentence will apply to defendants convicted of distribution of fifty grams or more of crack cocaine. The maximum potential sentence for distributing at least five grams but less than fifty grams of crack cocaine is forty years in prison. And, the maximum potential sentence for distributing less than five grams is twenty years in prison. If convicted, the actual sentence for each of the defendants in these two cases will be determined by a federal judge and based in part on the defendant's criminal history.

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These cases are the result of an investigation by the Lake Superior Drug and Gang Task Force, the Duluth Police Department, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Assistance was also provided by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Christian S. Wilton and W. Anders Folk.

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An indictment is a determination by a grand jury that there is probable cause to believe that offenses have been committed by the defendant. The defendant, of course, is presumed innocent until he or she pleads guilty or is proven guilty at trial.