



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONDAY MAY 6, 2002

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**CITY, COUNTY, STATE AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS
UNVEIL PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS**

20 defendants indicted in federal crackdown on illegal gun use and possession

CHICAGO – City, county, state and federal law enforcement officials today unveiled new strategic partnerships tailored to local needs in an intensive offensive against gun crime, announcing the implementation of Project Safe Neighborhoods in Chicago and Cook and surrounding counties. Project Safe Neighborhoods is a nationwide program to reduce gun violence, adaptable to local circumstances, that was launched last year by President Bush and Attorney General John Ashcroft. In Chicago, federal authorities worked with their state and local partners to create an aggressive attack on gun violence, seeking the most serious penalties for gun crime. The cornerstone of the program in Chicago and Cook County is that every state defendant with a gun will be reviewed for possible federal prosecution: the aim of the program is to target the harshest penalties for the worst offenders and to publicize the effort in order to change behavior.

Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, introduced the measures at a press conference together with Mayor Richard M. Daley; Richard A. Devine, Cook County State's Attorney; W. Larry Ford, Special Agent-in-Charge of Alcohol,

Tobacco and Firearms; Chicago Police Supt. Terry Hillard; George DeTella, Associate Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections; Veronica Ballard, Chief Probation Officer of the Cook County Adult Probation Department; and representatives of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police and the Illinois State Police. The press conference was held in the Columbus Park Refectory, in the Austin neighborhood on the city's west side because the goal of the initiative is to make communities like Austin safer for its residents. Chicago police and ATF agents are concentrating some of their initial efforts in the adjoining 11th and 15th police districts on the west side.

Mr. Fitzgerald also announced 21 new federal indictments that were returned last week charging the defendants with various federal firearms offenses, including being a felon-in-possession or an armed career criminal, straw purchasing (purchasing a gun in one person's name for transfer to someone else who can't buy a gun legally), and providing a gun and ammunition to a minor, as part of the crackdown.

Project Safe Neighborhoods has five core elements: partnerships between state and federal officers and prosecutors, strategic planning, training, community outreach and accountability. Chicago police last year recovered more than 10,000 guns and the city recorded 666 homicides, with more than 75 percent the result of shootings.

As part of the program every two weeks, an Assistant U.S. Attorney and an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney meet to review state gun cases in which federal prosecution would yield a significantly greater sentence, often resulting from the Armed Career Criminal statute. That statute provides that a defendant who possesses a firearm and who has three prior state or federal violent felony or serious drug convictions faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years in prison, *without any possibility of parole*. Most of the indictments announced today involve cases that were referred for federal prosecution by the Cook County State's Attorney's

Office. Similar arrangements are underway with the State's Attorney's Offices in Lake, DuPage and Will counties, and federal and state prosecutors are discussing expanding the program to other collar and outlying counties.

“It is time to take back our streets so that good people do not live in fear and can walk to church or school and not get shot,” Mr. Fitzgerald said. “We have to change the way people with guns think. They have to be afraid to carry a gun – not afraid to be without one. Those people who have committed crimes in the past now get one final warning: *No more guns*. Those that don't think about it now may spend 15 years thinking about it later.”

Mayor Daley praised the new initiative. “Under Project Safe Neighborhoods, when career criminals are caught with firearms, they will be turned over to the federal government for prosecution, whenever possible,” he said. “As a result, more dangerous criminals will be sent to prison for longer terms. This is good news for the millions of law-abiding citizens of the City of Chicago. Because they just want these criminals and their weapons removed from their neighborhoods, so their families can live in peace and safety,”

Chicago and Cook County have each received money from the federal government to hire additional gun prosecutors under Project Safe Neighborhoods.

Mr. Devine added: “Together with the city, state and federal authorities, we will reach into the heart of these troubled communities to clamp down on the worst of the worst and the most dangerous criminals. This is a strong partnership and we have high hopes of curbing violence in these two troubled areas out here on the west side.”

While Project Safe Neighborhoods is being implemented citywide and beyond, special emphasis is being focused on the 11th and 15th districts where gun violence is especially high. A special task force for these districts was created to identify the individuals and groups most responsible for gun violence, to identify the areas most vulnerable to such violence, to provide

specialized training for police officers and prosecutors, and to involve the community in the task force's efforts to formulate the most effective strategy for reducing gun violence.

“We come out to Austin to announce this bold new initiative because this is where gangs, guns and drugs are having a very destructive impact,” Superintendent Hillard said. “We also come out to this neighborhood because of the thousands and thousands of hard-working, law-abiding residents who are standing up to the violence and the gangs to say enough is enough.”

Mr. Ford, of ATF, added: “ATF makes no secret of our passion for taking serious felons with guns off the street. We must make the consequences of illegal gun use certain.”

Another key component of the overall strategy is to target approximately 30,000 state parolees and another 30,000 state probationers in Cook County (with the highest populations in both categories living in the 11th and 15th districts), with the assistance of the Illinois Department of Corrections and the Cook County Adult Probation Department. Both agencies are sending out letters from Project Safe Neighborhoods notifying the parolees and probationers of the severe penalties for gun possession by felons and that any future gun case will be reviewed for federal prosecution. “This project will be much more successful with the assistance of IDOC parole and field service units,” said IDOC Director Donald Snyder.

Training, community outreach and analysis are also essential elements of the Safe Neighborhoods project. The government plans to hire a researcher who will assist in the strategic planning and accountability of the program. In addition, the project will include aggressive prosecution of firearms traffickers who sell guns destined for Illinois, no matter where the traffickers are located.

A list of the defendants whose indictments were announced today is attached. Additional information about Project Safe Neighborhoods may be found at www.psn.gov

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