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February 7, 2009

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ROCKFORD MAN SENTENCED TO 120 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR POSSESSING A FIREARM AS A CONVICTED FELON

ROCKFORD -- PATRICK J. FITZGERALD, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; ANDREW L. TRAVER, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; RICHARD A. MEYERS, Chief of the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department; and CHET EPPERSON, Chief of the Rockford Police Department, today made the following announcement:

Late Friday afternoon, United States District Judge Frederick J. Kapala sentenced **JOSE FRANCISCO TAPIA, aka JOSE TAPIA BECERRA, aka MONKEY**, 28, of Rockford, Illinois, to 120 months in federal prison for illegally possessing a firearm as a convicted felon. Tapia was also ordered to serve three years of supervised release following his release from prison. There is no parole in the federal system. Tapia was found guilty of possessing a firearm as a convicted felon on October 21, 2008, after a two-day jury trial in federal court in Rockford.

Tapia was arrested on an outstanding warrant on May 19, 2008, in Rockford, Illinois by members of the Rockford Police Department Gang Unit, Winnebago Sheriff's Police, and Special Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. The firearm was discovered upon the execution of a search warrant.

At Tapia's sentencing hearing Judge Kapala also found that Tapia was responsible for a shooting on South Greenview Avenue in Rockford on April 9, 2008. Investigators and Crime Scene Technicians from the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department recovered a total of 64 shell casings from the scene at South Greenview and determined that at least 37 bullets struck the residence, which was occupied at the time by two adults and two children. Bullet fragments were recovered in the living room, kitchen, a bedroom, and the basement. Through ballistics analysis performed by the Illinois State Police, Rockford Forensic Science Laboratory, the firearm possessed by Tapia was determined to have been one of the firearms used in the South Greenview shooting.

Tapia was charged in federal court under tough federal firearms laws as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods program. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an intensive, cooperative effort between local, state, and federal law enforcement to attack gun crimes. The cornerstone of the program is that every defendant committing an offense involving a gun will be reviewed for possible federal prosecution in order to obtain the harshest penalties

for the worst offenders. Additional information about Project Safe Neighborhoods may be found at www.psn.gov.

The case was investigated by Special Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department, and the Rockford Police Department, with the assistance of the Illinois State Police Forensic Laboratory. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Michael F. Iasparro and Monica V. Mallory.

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