



ATF News

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
Los Angeles Field Division

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ATF ARRESTS TWO LINKED TO COMPTON GUN STORE ACCUSED OF KNOWINGLY SELLING GUNS TO FELONS

LOS ANGELES – Two Southern California men were arrested this morning on federal charges that allege they sold firearms and ammunition to straw buyers who were purchasing the weapons on behalf of convicted felons and other prohibited persons, announced John A. Torres, Special Agent in Charge, Los Angeles Field Division, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

Stephen Patrick Virgilio, 36, of Huntington Beach, and Carlos Rodriguez Castellanos, 52, of Downey, were arrested without incident at their respective residences. In addition to the arrests, authorities executed federal search and seizure warrants at Boulevard Sales & Service in Compton, where Virgilio and Castellanos worked, and another Boulevard Sales store located in American Hay and Mercantile in Oak View. At the stores, hundreds of firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition were seized.

According to an affidavit filed in this case, during a five-year period, 897 firearms linked to a crime or illegally possessed were traced back to Boulevard Sales & Service. Of these traced guns, at least 29 were connected to murder investigations.

The search and arrest warrants stem from an undercover investigation into Boulevard Sales' illegal sales of firearms and ammunition to known felons and prohibited persons. According to the affidavit, confidential informants with prior felony convictions, and undercover law enforcement officers posing as straw buyers for these informants, were able to purchase 14 firearms from Boulevard Sales & Service. Those weapons included a Hi-Point Model CF 380 .380-caliber handgun; a Glock Model 30 .45-caliber, semi-automatic pistol; a Bushmaster, Model Carbon-15, .223-caliber, semi-automatic rifle; a Mossberg, Model 500A, 12-gauge, pump-action shotgun, and a Mossberg, Model 100 ATR, 30-06 caliber, bolt-action rifle with scope.

The informants allegedly were also able to purchase large quantities of ammunition, including three cases of bullets used in AK-47-type rifles. According to the affidavit, Virgilio and Castellanos both willingly sold firearms and ammunition through the straw buyers to the informants, despite being told that the informants were convicted felons barred by law from purchasing or possessing firearms or ammunition.

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Virgilio and Castellanos are each charged in a criminal complaint filed late yesterday with one count of sale of ammunition to a felon.

“According to the affidavit filed in this case, Stephen Virgilio and Carlos Castellanos participated in repeated transfers of firearms through straw buyers to individuals who could not otherwise purchase those firearms,” Torres said. “The laws they are alleged to have violated are designed precisely to keep firearms and ammunition out of the hands of prohibited persons, including persons with prior felony convictions. The ATF will do everything in its power to ensure that these laws are complied with, and that firearms are kept out of the hands of those who would use them to commit other crimes.”

Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca said: “This is a strong step toward taking illegal guns off the street. These are weapons of terror that can reach the hands of teenagers who, in turn, can use these weapons in the commission of a crime. That will not stand. Make no mistake about this: We will confiscate arrest and help to prosecute those who traffic in the sale of illegal guns.”

Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo stated: “I applaud the work of the ATF, Sheriff Baca and the United States Attorney in this investigation. Taking dangerous firearms out of the hands of gang members and felons is one of my top priorities as City Attorney and success in that endeavor requires a comprehensive approach to public safety. That is why I asked my prosecutors to work with the United States Attorney’s Office. We are all working together to make our communities safe and today’s charges represent a giant step forward in that effort.”

Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton stated: “Arresting and identifying individual(s) who engage in illegal guns sales is paramount in our efforts in reducing the number of guns on our streets. Today’s announcement sends a clear message that we in law enforcement will do everything we can to combat this problem. Thanks to the cooperation among the various agencies both locally and federally, a major source of the pandemic has been eradicated.”

The criminal case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jeffrey Backhus (213-894-4267) and Special Assistant United States Attorney Shawn Nelson (213-894-5339). The criminal case is part of the Department of Justice’s Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative, in which federal and local prosecutors work together with law enforcement authorities to combat gun violence. Backhus is the Project Safe Neighborhoods Coordinator for the seven-county Central District of California. Nelson is a senior Deputy City Attorney with the Gang Unit at the Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office, who has been assigned to work with federal authorities to prosecute gun offenses as part of Project Safe Neighborhoods.

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Dale A. Ferranto, Assistant Bureau Chief, California Department of Justice - Bureau of Firearms, commented: "The California Department of Justice Bureau of Firearms licenses, inspects, regulates, and investigates approximately 1,450 firearms dealerships in California through which approximately 1,000 firearms are sold and transferred each day of the year. The Bureau of Firearms expects firearms dealers to comply with all laws and regulations that prevent 'straw purchases' and that ensure legal and responsible firearms ownership. The Bureau of Firearms is proactive in preventing firearms possession by prohibited individuals that include convicted criminals, domestic violence defendants or respondents, other court restrained persons, and the mentally ill."

Torres added: "This investigation exemplifies the prosecutorial and investigative partnerships ATF has formed to combat the illegal sales of firearms." Participating in today's operations were the Los Angeles Police Department, the Long Beach Police Department, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, the California Department of Justice Firearms Bureau, the Ventura County Sheriff's Department, the Downey Police Department and the Huntington Beach Police Department.

More information on ATF and its programs to reduce violent crime can be found at www.atf.gov.

More information on Project Safe Neighborhoods can be found at www.psn.gov.

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