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**THE SUCCESS OF PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS IN
WATERBURY**

Today's arrest of 20 individuals on firearms charges is the culmination of a ten-month undercover investigation spearheaded by the Waterbury State's Attorney's Office, Waterbury Police Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). The investigation targeted illegal firearms trafficking with the City of Waterbury and sought to identify and arrest local felons known to possess and illegally transfer firearms. A series of proactive gun investigations was initiated in early July 2004 and resulted in the arrests and convictions of approximately 17 individuals on state and federal firearms violations. Information gathered during the investigation in the summer and fall of 2004 led to the arrests today.

Prior to today's arrests, the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative in Waterbury has resulted in 106 felony firearm convictions since the program's inception in Waterbury in August 2003. In addition, seven Waterbury defendants have been prosecuted federally by the United States Attorney's Office. Two of these felons, Jose Rivera and Marland Davis, have been prosecuted pursuant to the federal Armed Career Criminal Act, which requires a mandatory minimum term of imprisonment of 15 years for felons in possession of a firearm who are previously convicted of at least three serious felonies and/or drug convictions. A third defendant, Eugene Coleman, has been charged pursuant to the Armed Career Criminal Act and faces trial in the fall. Coleman is presumed to be innocent until proved guilty at trial.

As a result of these prosecutions under the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative, violent crime in Waterbury has declined approximately 25% since the program's inception.

Project Safe Neighborhoods is a Department of Justice national initiative aimed at reducing gun violence, deterring illegal possession of guns, and improving the safety of residents of cities across the country. Under the direction of the United States Attorney's Office in Connecticut, Project Safe Neighborhoods is active in five cities: Waterbury, Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport and Stamford. Participants in the initiative include community members and organizations as well as federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

An important component of Project Safe Neighborhoods is offender outreach. Offender meetings are organized to educate offenders about both opportunities that are available to them, and the risks associated with participating in further illegal behavior - including the strict penalties associated with illegal firearm possession. In Waterbury, offender meetings have been held on a monthly basis since October 2003. The U.S. Attorney's Office, Waterbury State's Attorney's Office and Waterbury Police coordinate these meetings with representatives of State Probation, Parole and the Connecticut Department of Correction, the Department of Labor and Mercy Hospital. Attendance is made mandatory by the participating agencies, and approximately 60 felons attend each month.

To date, more than 1000 violent felony offenders have participated in offender meetings in Waterbury. Only four individuals who have attended a meeting have been subsequently arrested and prosecuted on felony firearms charges.

More information on the nationwide Project Safe Neighborhoods Initiative can be found at www.psn.gov <<http://www.psn.gov>>.

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