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**NEW STATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP AIMS TO COMBAT  
GUN VIOLENCE IN JACKSONVILLE**

State Attorney Melissa Nelson today announced a Fourth Circuit partnership with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida to ensure appropriate referral and federal prosecution of violent criminals and drug dealers who use and possess firearms.

This strategic initiative includes having a Special Agent from ATF on-site who will review all firearm cases the office handles for potential federal firearm charges when appropriate. Cases in which a defendant qualifies for federal prosecution and lengthier sentences will be referred to federal prosecutors for appropriate prosecution.

Having an on-site special agent permits greater intelligence sharing on cases with federal partners and provides a speedier referral of cases suited for federal prosecution to federal authorities. One goal of the initiative is to ensure that armed career criminals (who have violent felony records or have engaged in serious drug trafficking offenses) face federal minimum mandatory sentences of 15 years instead of the three years normally faced under Florida law when they possess a firearm.

"We will be working closely with our state and federal law enforcement partners to ensure crimes involving the illegal possession and use of firearms will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," said Nelson. "This is another step in showing the community that these types of crimes will not be tolerated."

The ATF Tampa Field Division's jurisdiction includes the Fourth Circuit counties of Clay, Duval and Nassau. Part of ATF's mission is dedicated to combating firearm violence through efforts targeting violent repeat offenders, career criminals, gun traffickers, and gangs. ATF does so through working with partner agencies at the local, state and federal levels.

"A key component of ATF's mission is reducing violent crime," said Daryl McCrary, Special Agent in Charge of the ATF Tampa Field Division. "The Fourth Circuit State Attorney's Office commitment to reducing firearms violence effectively enables ATF and our partners to execute its investigative strategies and priorities."

The United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida also has increased its prosecutorial resources and efforts to address firearms and violent crimes. The office routinely coordinates with the Jacksonville Gun Crime Unit, consisting of members of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, ATF and state and federal prosecutors who regularly meet to discuss investigation and prosecution of gun crimes. The office has operated the Project Safe Neighborhoods program, a nationwide commitment to reducing gun and gang crime.

"This new partnership will leverage state and federal resources and enhance our ability to fight violent crime in the Jacksonville area," said United States Attorney A. Lee Bentley, III.

This latest local collaboration builds on past efforts and follows in the footsteps of similar working arrangements in Orlando and Tampa.