



Department of Justice

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**ATTORNEY GENERAL ASHCROFT ANNOUNCES RECORD INCREASE
IN FEDERAL FIREARMS PROSECUTIONS, NEW RESOURCES
TO PREVENT AND PROSECUTE GUN VIOLENCE**

Second Annual Project Safe Neighborhoods Conference Held in Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA – Attorney General John Ashcroft this week brought together over 1,300 federal prosecutors, state and local law enforcement leaders, and other members of the Project Safe Neighborhoods teams from across the nation to coordinate the prosecution and reduction of gun violence in their communities. The Attorney General applauded the record progress the teams have made in making their communities more safe, and dedicated new resources to deterring gun violence and locking up those who commit gun crimes. The Attorney General also discussed the integration of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives into the Justice Department, and the assistance they will provide in the fight against gun violence.

“Preventing gun crimes is one of the most important priorities for this Administration, and this conference brings together all the federal, state, and local law enforcement officials that work together every day to take violent criminals off the streets and reclaim their communities,” said Attorney General Ashcroft.

A Record of Increased Prosecutions. Since this Administration implemented Project Safe Neighborhoods, federal gun crime prosecutions have increased by 32 percent. In 2002, more than 10,600 defendants were charged for violating federal firearms statutes, and 93 percent received prison sentences. Seventy-one percent of those sentenced will spend three or more years in prison.

As two-thirds of all firearms crimes are committed by repeat offenders, the increased investigation and prosecution of gun crimes will make our communities more safe by ensuring that those who abuse guns are not free to prey on our citizens. In fact, gun violence has decreased dramatically in the last ten years – it accounted for about 12 percent of all violent crime in 1993 (over 1.2 million non-lethal victimizations using a firearm), but accounted for only 9 percent (just over a half million non-lethal violent crimes committed) in the most recent statistics available from the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics.

New Funding to Combat Gun Violence Across the Nation. This year, PSN awarded more than \$117 million through five grant programs to hire new prosecutors, researchers and community outreach staff in states and counties across the nation. The grants will be implemented by the U.S. Attorneys in 94 federal judicial districts. Organizations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are receiving funds to help develop a community-specific strategy to combat gun crimes. The grant programs and monetary awards are as follows:

- **Media Outreach and Community Engagement Award - \$16 million.** Partners, in 94 federal judicial districts, who received this grant will research, create and produce public service announcements and comprehensive communications strategies to deter gun violence in their local area. The focus of the grants is encouraging community support and promoting strict punishment of all firearms-related violent crime.
- **Research Partner/Crime Analyst Award - \$15 million.** Research partners in 94 federal judicial districts will work with PSN, Justice Department and the Michigan State University- School of Criminal Justice to examine trends in firearms-related violence and engage in strategic problem-solving on the issue. The grantees will collect data, analyze findings and report on best practices around the country of crime control and prevention.
- **Project Sentry Grant - \$13 million.** The program focuses on juvenile-related gun violence and strategies to keep illegal guns out of the hands of America's youth. The grants, awarded to 36 counties, will be used to increase jurisdiction capabilities to arrest, detain, prosecute and provide supervision to juveniles involved in firearms-related crimes. The program supports federal-state partnerships that promote coordination at all levels to identify, prosecute and punish offenders. That includes targeting gun dealers and adults who illegally purchase or provide guns to juveniles or otherwise contribute to a juvenile committing a violent crime with a firearm.
- **Open Solicitation Award - \$10 million.** These grants fund innovative local responses to gun violence. There were 41 jurisdictions chosen for funding. Each will create and implement a unique local program focused on prevention, community outreach and education; enforcement, adjudication and supervision programs; or some other innovative project to stem violent gun crimes.
- **Community Gun Violence Prosecution Program - \$63 million.** The Office of Justice Programs awarded funds to help state and local governments hire approximately 550 new prosecutors to handle cases involving firearms law violations in areas of high illegal gun violence.

Additional Federal Prosecutors. In 2002, funding for PSN resulted in the hiring of 113 new Assistant U.S. Attorneys focused solely on gun crimes. An additional 94 AUSAs are now being hired to concentrate on gun crimes involving juveniles.

A Comprehensive Approach to Reducing Gun Violence. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an unprecedented partnership between all levels of government to implement a national strategy to attack gun violence with focus and intensity. While national in scope, each community's PSN task force is working to design and implement a local approach to combat the unique criminal circumstances that the area faces.

Project Safe Neighborhoods relies on a seamless network of law enforcement professionals who utilize a strategy of cooperation and coordination to prevent illegal gun use, as well as to punish violators and put criminals who use guns behind bars. Prosecutors pursue the strongest possible punishment for those who violate firearms statutes. Community partners aggressively educate their constituents, such as youths in at-risk areas, about the consequence of illegal gun violence through services and resources provided by PSN. Since this program began, more than 10,000 people across the nation have received training from PSN to assist in the fight against illegal gun use.

ATF Integration into the Justice Department Brings Additional Focus on Investigating Gun Crimes. The Attorney General also discussed the integration of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives into the Justice Department, and the hiring of 400 new agents to support Project Safe Neighborhoods. The Justice Department's law enforcement efforts will be assisted by the nearly 4,800 dedicated ATF employees – including 2,300 special agents with expertise in firearms, explosives and arson investigations – and specialized laboratories.

At the conference, local team members were addressed by several senior federal government officials, including Attorney General Ashcroft, Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson, and the Acting Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, Bradley Buckles. PSN conference training topics ranged from enforcement strategies to get gun violators off the streets, to school programs to prevent violence, as well as community partnership building to share ideas and resources.

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The conference is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police, National District Attorneys Association and the National Crime Prevention Council. To find out about more about PSN and its local programs, visit the PSN website at www.psn.gov.

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