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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**PHILADELPHIA DISTRICT ATTORNEY AND ATF  
ANNOUNCE VERDICT IN WITNESS INTIMIDATION CASE**

*Shaheed Williams and Aki Jones to be sentenced on September 21, 2015*

**PHILADELPHIA (June 17, 2015)** – Philadelphia District Attorney R. Seth Williams today announced that the ongoing partnership his office has with the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has yielded a guilty verdict in an important witness intimidation case. On June 15, 2015, Shaheed Williams and Aki Jones were convicted by a jury of Attempted Murder, Aggravated Assault, Witness Intimidation, Conspiracy and related charges.

"The ATF is one of our strongest investigative and prosecutorial partners and my team and I are thankful for their expertise and hard work and congratulate them on another successful prosecution," said District Attorney Williams. "Unfortunately, today's announcement is not all good news, because a witness who stood up and did the right thing was shot. I hope this verdict not only sends a clear message to those who think that it's a good idea to intimidate a witness, but reminds them that they probably shouldn't even think about doing it."

The victim in this case was Michael Vessels. Vessels was targeted because he was a witness to an earlier incident where Aki Jones had discharged a gun. After Vessels testified at the case's preliminary hearing, Jones initiated a campaign of witness intimidation and bribery from prison to convince Vessels not to testify. Two other co-defendants, Troy Cooper and Charles Alexander, have already pled guilty to their involvement in the intimidation scheme. On the day Jones' gun case was listed for trial, Shaheed Williams waited for Vessels outside of his home, shot him five times and stood over him saying "You won't talk no more."

"The convictions of all four of the defendants is a testament to justice, to citizen courage, and to the intolerance of violent crime. These defendants have been held accountable for the heinous act of shooting someone who was brave enough to come forward to law enforcement, and identify them and their criminal actions." said Kelly Brady, ATF Acting Special Agent in Charge. "I applaud the tremendous effort of the Assistant District Attorneys, special agents and detectives involved in this investigation and prosecution that led to a jury swiftly returning guilty verdicts. ATF will continue to work side-by-side with our partners from the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office and the Philadelphia Police Department to arrest those ultra-violent individuals who threaten the security of our City."

ATF Special Agent Charles Bowman and Detective James Kopaczewski, a member of the Philadelphia Police Department's Major Crimes who is detailed to the ATF, saw that the facts of Jones' earlier case involved a gun used in a crime of violence and began their own investigation developing it for federal prosecution. Eventually, the ATF, working with the US Attorney's Office, secured an indictment of Aki Jones and we withdrew the duplicative state charges. In Federal court, Jones pled guilty to the original

gun charges on Dec. 5, 2011, and was sentenced a few months later to five years in federal prison, followed by three years of supervised release.

Because of their relationship with Vessels in the course of obtaining the indictment of Jones, the ATF was aware of the retaliatory shooting of Vessels and worked closely with the Philadelphia Police Department to solve the case. In order to do so, the ATF conducted numerous search warrants, located and interviewed witnesses, seized several cell phones and archived the letters that were used to eventually prove the conspiracy.

The District Attorney's Office presented the collected evidence to the grand jury and charges arose from the secret proceeding, a process that was specifically chosen to protect the remaining witnesses who were involved in the case.

Shaheed Williams and Aki Jones will be sentenced by Hon. Barbara McDermott on September 21, 2015.

*The Philadelphia District Attorney's Office is the largest prosecutor's office in Pennsylvania, and one of the largest in the nation. It serves the more than 1.5 million citizens of the City and County of Philadelphia, employing 600 lawyers, detectives and support staff. It is organized into seven divisions: Executive/Administration, Trials, Pre-Trial, Investigations, Juvenile, Law, and Special Operations. The District Attorney's Office is responsible for prosecution of over 75,000 criminal cases annually. The main office of the Philadelphia District Attorney is located in Center City Philadelphia at The Widener Building, Three South Penn Square. The Juvenile Court and Child Support Unit are located at 1501 Arch Street, and the Private Criminal Complaint Unit is located at 1425 Arch Street. Additionally, the Charging Unit is staffed around the clock in The Widener Building.*

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