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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

District of South Carolina

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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40 Charged in Largest Federal Racketeering Conspiracy in South Carolina History

147-Count Indictment Includes Inmates Orchestrating Murder, Kidnapping, Drugs and Firearms Distribution from Prison

Columbia, South Carolina --- United States Attorney Peter M. McCoy, Jr., announced today that a federal grand jury has returned a 147-count superseding indictment against 40 defendants across South Carolina in the largest federal racketeering conspiracy in South Carolina history. The indictment alleges a sprawling criminal enterprise whereby inmates with the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC), often by means of contraband cell phones, orchestrated murder, kidnapping, firearms distribution, and an international drug operation.

Specifically, the grand jury charged 17 of the defendants with conspiracy under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, a statute designed to eliminate organized crime and prosecute the racketeering activities of these organizations. Several of the crimes alleged in the indictment were charged under the Violent Crimes in Aid of Racketeering (VICAR) statute, which makes it a crime for a person to commit any of a list of violent crimes in return for, among other things, maintaining or increasing position within the enterprise. Of the 40 defendants, 24 defendants were charged in the initial indictment in this case for conduct related to their alleged roles in the enterprise's drug trafficking organization.

"The defendants allegedly operated a violent and lucrative drug enterprise on behalf of the Insane Gangster Disciples while incarcerated," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Brian C. Rabbitt of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "The department is committed to investigating and prosecuting gang-related crimes no matter where they occur, including holding those accountable who engage in criminal activity while in prison."

“To anyone who would try to harm the people of South Carolina with violence, intimidation or extortion, we are coming after you wherever you are,” said United States Attorney McCoy. “Neither pandemic nor prison walls will provide refuge from the full force of the federal government.”

The case began in July 2017 as an investigation by a number of agencies, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the Lexington County Multi-Agency Narcotics Enforcement Team, and the Eleventh Circuit Solicitor’s Office, into methamphetamine trafficking and the illegal sale of firearms. The investigation grew and began to focus on the Insane Gangster Disciples (IGD), a branch of the nationwide gang Folk Nation.

According to the indictment, several IGD members, while SCDC inmates and with the assistance of others on the outside, ran a drug empire from prison using contraband cell phones and other means. Further, the indictment alleges that several IGD members in prison ordered violent retaliatory measures against those they believed were providing information to law enforcement and against individuals they believed had stolen drug proceeds or owed money to the gang. It is alleged these violent acts, to include murder and kidnapping, were often carried out by IGD members outside the jails. Additionally, the 101-page indictment alleges that to perpetuate the enterprise and to maintain and extend its power, members and associates of the gang committed, attempted to commit, and conspired to commit, additional acts such as armed robbery, extortion, arson, assault and battery, drug trafficking, money laundering, and obstruction of justice.

“While the U.S. Attorney’s Office in South Carolina has a long and respected history of seeking justice for victims of crime, in the past year, my office has taken an even deeper look into the violence of organized crime and drug gangs,” United States Attorney McCoy added. “As such, we have sought and received some of the harshest sentences of any U.S. Attorney’s Office in the country. Be it in jail or on the outside, organized crime organizations in South Carolina will be sought out as aggressively as the law allows.”

“This was a complex, multi-jurisdictional investigation aimed at taking down an alleged criminal operation of historic reach in our states,” said ATF Special Agent in Charge Vince Pallozzi. “The brazen criminal acts charged fueled gun violence and drug trafficking in numerous counties and cities. To shut down this alleged operation is a major win for public safety in South Carolina.”

“This alleged vast and brazen criminal enterprise only could have been dismantled by a united and dedicated team of law enforcement officers from across this state,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge Susan Ferensic. “The FBI is proud to be part of that team. We will see this investigation through and will remain vigilant to identify and arrest all those who try to destroy our communities through violence and drug trafficking.”

“As alleged in the indictments, illegal cell phones enabled these inmates to operate a sophisticated, international drug trafficking ring from inside prison walls,” said Bryan Stirling, Director of the S.C. Department of Corrections. “We cannot ensure the public is safe from criminals until states are allowed to jam cell phone signals. We need Congress to act on this pressing public safety issue and schedule a hearing on the Cellphone Jamming Reform Act.”

“This case is another example of how joint cooperation, sharing of information, and good communication between state, federal, and local agencies can be most productive for the cause of justice in South Carolina,” said South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson, who thanked all the state, federal, and local agencies involved in this joint investigation, including the contributions of State Grand Jury Division staff.

“It goes without saying that the success of this case would not have materialized if it weren’t for the

intentional open line of communication between all the agencies involved," said Greenville County Sheriff Hobart Lewis. "The tremendous collaboration between agencies and their willingness to put the success of the investigation above all else is a testament to the professionalism in our state and I am so proud to be a part of this law enforcement family."

"I'm proud of the cooperation of law enforcement involved in this case and the officers from our agency," said Cherokee County Sheriff Steve Mueller. "The criminals who desire to prey on our citizens should know we stand ready to pursue them relentlessly using all available resources at the local, state and federal level to hold them accountable for violating the law."

"This case is a result of hard work and long hours," said Laurens County Sheriff Don Reynolds. "I'm proud of the hard work by the Laurens County Sheriff's Office. I'm also glad for the team effort of all involved to achieve these results."

"We are proud to have worked with all the participating local, state and federal agencies to get a high volume of drugs and guns off the street," said Lexington County Sheriff Jay Koon. "Communities are safer because of all the cooperation between agencies. With strong relationships in place, we can really make a difference in the lives of those we serve."

"Criminals will realize that law enforcement agencies work together," said Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott. "And even if they try to take advantage of jurisdictional lines, they will not get away with their misdeeds. No matter how long it takes, we will get them."

"The interagency partnership in this case was unprecedented and has increased the safety of not only our community but those throughout the state as well," said Anderson County Sheriff Chad McBride.

"Once again, we see the tremendous cooperation of law enforcement in South Carolina," said Pickens County Sheriff Rick Clark. "Our professional narcotics agents across the state work tirelessly to make these arrests and fight the war on drugs in our communities."

The following defendants have been charged in the indictment for conduct related to their alleged roles in the RICO conspiracy and/or related crimes:

- Matthew J. Ward, a/k/a "Bones," 36, of Lexington;
- Rebecca Martinez, 33, of Lexington;
- Cynthia Rooks, 52, of Lexington;
- Richard Ford, 62, of Lexington;
- Amber Hoffman, 26, of Lexington;
- Samuel Dexter Judy, 29, of Lexington;
- Brian Bruce, 48, of West Columbia;
- Montana Barefoot, 25, of Lexington;
- John Johnson, 36, of Gaston;
- Kelly Still, 43, of Windsor;
- Benjamin Singleton, 46, of Lexington;
- Kayla Mattoni, 38, of Lexington;
- Alexia Youngblood, 38, of Lexington;
- Clifford Kyzer, 35, of Lexington;
- Kelly Jordan, 34, of Williamston;
- Mark Edward Slusher, 46, of Lexington;
- Robert Figueroa, 43, of West Columbia;
- Tiffanie Brooks, 36, of Columbia;
- Crystal Nicole Bright, 40, of Lexington;

- Brittney Shae Stephens, 32, of Anderson;
- Arian Grace Jeane, 26, of Greenville;
- Lisa Marie Costello, 43, of Gaffney;
- Aaron Corey Sprouse, 29, of Gaffney;
- Matthew Edward Clark, 41, of York;
- James Robert Peterson, a/k/a/ "Man Man," 32, of Gaffney;
- Edward Gary Akridge, a/k/a "G9," a/k/a "G9 the Don," a/k/a/ "Eddie Boss," 28, of Greenville;
- Aaron Michael Carrion, a/k/a "Cap G," 28, of Lexington;
- Heather Henderson Orrick, 33, of Greenville;
- Virginia Ruth Ryall, 43, of Gastonia, North Carolina;
- Lisa Marie Bolton, 32, of Dallas, North Carolina;
- Catherine Amanda Ross, 28, of Gaffney;
- Brandon Lee Phillips, a/k/a "Lil B," 36, of Gaffney;
- Billy Wayne Ruppe, 55, of Gaffney;
- Windy Brooke George, 21, of Gaffney;
- Juan Rodriguez, a/k/a "Fat Boy," 40, of Woodruff;
- Jonathan Eugene Merchant, a/k/a/ "Merck," 27, of Laurens;
- Joshua Lee Scott Brown, 23, of Greenville;
- Jennifer Sorgee, 36, of Easley;
- Alex Blake Payne, 28, of Greenville; and
- Sally Williams Burgess, a/k/a "Cricket," 37, of Greenville.

Of these defendants, Ward, Peterson, Akridge, and Rodriguez were serving sentences in SCDC at the time the alleged crimes were committed.

Every defendant charged in the RICO conspiracy faces the potential penalty of life in prison due to sentencing enhancements through IGD's involvement in murders and significant drug trafficking. Additionally, the defendants charged with murder in aid of racketeering and kidnapping in aid of racketeering also face life imprisonment. There are additional penalties for those charged with firearms crimes, drug crimes, robbery, and assault.

In connection with the investigation, law enforcement seized approximately 40 kilograms of methamphetamine, more than 130 firearms, and various quantities of heroin and fentanyl.

The case was investigated by the ATF, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Lexington County Sheriff's Department, Lexington County Multi-Agency Narcotics Enforcement Team, SCDC, Greenville County Sheriff's Office, Anderson County Sheriff's Office, South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), Cherokee County Sheriff's Office, Laurens County Sheriff's Office, Pickens County Sheriff's Office, and Richland County Sheriff's Department. The South Carolina Attorney General's Office, Fifth Circuit Solicitor's Office, Seventh Circuit Solicitor's Office, Eighth Circuit Solicitor's Office, Eleventh Circuit Solicitor's Office, and Thirteenth Circuit Solicitor's Office also assisted with the case.

The prosecutors on the case are Assistant United States Attorneys Justin Holloway and Brandi Hinton, of the Greenville office, Special Assistant United States Attorney Casey Rankin with the Eleventh Circuit Solicitor's Office, Department of Justice (DOJ) Trial Attorney Lisa Man, and Principal Deputy Kim Dammers with DOJ's Organized Crime and Gang Section.

This case is being prosecuted as part of the joint federal, state, and local Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), the centerpiece of the Department of Justice's violent crime reduction efforts. PSN is an evidence-based program proven to be effective at reducing violent crime. Through PSN, a broad

spectrum of stakeholders work together to identify the most pressing violent crime problems in the community and develop comprehensive solutions to address them. As part of this strategy, PSN focuses enforcement efforts on the most violent offenders and partners with locally based prevention and reentry programs for lasting reductions in crime.

The United States Attorney stated that all charges against these defendants are merely accusations and that all defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the Department of Justice. Learn more about the history of our agency at www.Justice.gov/Celebrating150Years.

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Topic(s):

Project Safe Neighborhoods

Contact:

Derek A. Shoemake (843) 813-0982

Component(s):

[USAO - South Carolina](#)

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