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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **GUN TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION OPERATING IN MONTGOMERY, BUCKS AND PHILADELPHIA COUNTIES DISMANTLED**

***Nine adults, five juveniles illegally obtained and sold 44 firearms***

### [Criminal Complaint](#)



Anthony McCrary

Terrence Barker

Ashon Pearson

Demetrius Huggins Jr.

Jamil Brown

Clarence Codada

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (Sept. 24, 2020) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele, Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, Norristown Police Chief Mark Talbot and FBI Special Agent in Charge Michael J. Driscoll today announced the dismantling of a gun trafficking organization that illegally obtained and resold 44 firearms in Montgomery, Bucks and Philadelphia counties. Nine adults and five juveniles were arrested or are being sought for charges related to straw purchases of firearms and illegally transferring firearms.

The gun trafficking organization was fueled by purchases by **Anthony McCrary**, 23, of Philadelphia, who purchased 35 firearms from July 3 to Aug. 27, 2020; **Demetrius Huggins Jr.**, 21, of Philadelphia, who purchased five firearms from July 7 to July 31, 2020; and **Shaireese Liles**, 21, of Philadelphia, who purchased four firearms from July 20 to Aug. 17, 2020. Those firearms were purchased on behalf of the gun trafficking organization led by **Terrance Barker**, 19, of Philadelphia; **Mikal Scott**, 18, of Cheltenham; and a **17-year-old male** from Norristown. Also involved were **Ashon Pearson**, 23, of Norristown; **Jamil Brown**, 18, **John McDonald**, 21, and **Clarence**

**Codada**, 18, all of Philadelphia; as well as **four other juvenile males** ranging in age from 14 to 17 years old.

The investigation was led by the Montgomery County Detective Bureau's Violent Crime Unit (VCU) and the Norristown Police Department with assistance from the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General's Gun Violence Task Force, the FBI's Bucks and Montgomery County Safe Streets Task Force, United States Marshals, Cheltenham Township Police Department, Abington Township Police Department, Philadelphia Police Department, Pennsylvania State Police, Warminster Township Police Department, Bensalem Police Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

The investigation began on Aug. 9, 2020, when Montgomery County Detectives were routinely reviewing paperwork related to multiple gun purchases by individuals and noted McCrary's high number of guns purchased from federally licensed dealers. The next day, on Aug. 10, 2020, Norristown Police responded to a shooting incident involving a 17-year-old male. A search of the residence where the shooting took place found two gun boxes that had been purchased on the day of the shooting by McCrary, who does not live at the residence. Neither gun had been reported stolen, indicating possible "straw purchases."

A "straw purchase" is when a person with a clean background purchases firearms specifically on behalf of another person to conceal the true ownership of the firearm. Persons who are unable to legally purchase a firearm would include convicted felons, domestic violence misdemeanants, juveniles and mentally ill individuals.

From there, law enforcement began investigating McCrary's firearms purchases both through the Electronic Record of Sale (EROS) system and through hard copies of ATF and Pennsylvania State Police forms at gun stores. They found that he had been buying an alarming number of firearms from firearms stores in Montgomery, Bucks and Philadelphia counties, sometimes visiting more than one gun store in a day and buying multiple firearms at the same time, often including multiple purchases of the same make and model of gun. The ensuing investigation used surveillance, cell phone analysis, review of federal firearms forms and EROS, social media analysis, search warrants, interviews and other methods of investigation to uncover the participants of the gun trafficking organization.

"We may never know the true extent of the damage from these 44 illegal guns since guns obtained using a straw purchaser are typically immediately resold to people who can't legally buy a gun for themselves. Then after an illegal firearm is used in a crime, it's resold to other felons and the damage grows. It's a domino effect," said DA Steele. "This type of organization's sole purpose is to make money by putting firearms in the hands of people who cannot lawfully buy and possess guns. Illegal firearms on our streets are a significant threat to public safety and should concern every law-abiding citizen."

EROS, part of the Office of the Attorney General's Track+Trace Initiative to assist in thwarting illegal transfers of firearms and decrease gun trafficking, was a key tool used in this investigation to track the illegal purchases of firearms by this gun trafficking organization.

“This investigation shows how the Track+Trace initiative can help law enforcement stop the straw purchasers who fuel our gun violence epidemic. I applaud District Attorney Steele, Chief Talbot and FBI Special Agent Driscoll for their great work and for getting guns out of the hands of people who shouldn’t have them,” Attorney General Shaprio said. “Our job is not over, we should keep expanding the use of electronic records and double down on this kind of targeted, data-driven, and collaborative law enforcement work to prevent senseless shootings and violence in our communities.”

Of the 44 firearms that have been found to be straw purchases for the organization by McCrary, Huggins and Liles, six have been recovered: one was seized during a shooting investigation in Cheltenham Township, one was found during a traffic stop in Abington Township and four guns were seized during investigations or through search warrants in Philadelphia.

The defendants were charged with varying crimes but all include felony counts of Corrupt Organizations and Conspiracy. Other charges include Dealing in Proceeds of Unlawful Activities, Receiving Stolen Property, Unlawful Transfer of a Firearm, Criminal Use of Communications Facilities, Corruption of Minors, Possession of a Firearm by Minor, Materially False Statements and multiple related offenses.

The defendants arrested and charged were arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Suzan Leonard today. She set bail for these defendants at: \$500,000 cash for McCrary, Barker, Huggins and Scott; \$250,000 for Pearson and Brown; and \$25,000 unsecured for Codada, who was released. The remaining defendants failed to make bail and were remanded to the Montgomery County Correctional Facility. The preliminary hearing for these defendants is in the process of being scheduled.

Detectives are in the process of locating and arresting McDonald and Scott. Anyone with information about their whereabouts is asked to call the Montgomery County Detective Bureau at 610-278-3368 or the Norristown Police Department at 610-270-0977.

The case will be prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Kathleen McLaughlin, who is the Captain of the Firearms Unit, and Assistant District Attorney Samantha Arena of the Firearms Unit.

Approved for release:

Kevin R. Steele

*CRIMINAL CHARGES, AND ANY DISCUSSION THEREOF, ARE MERELY ALLEGATIONS AND ALL DEFENDANTS ARE PRESUMED INNOCENT UNTIL AND UNLESS PROVEN GUILTY.*