



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

KEVIN R. STEELE

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

EDWARD F. McCANN, JR.

FIRST ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

COUNTY OF MONTGOMERY

COURTHOUSE

P.O. BOX 311

NORRISTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

19404-0311

SAMUEL J. GALLEN

CHIEF COUNTY DETECTIVE

JESSE S. KING

CHIEF OF STAFF

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S FAX

COUNTY DETECTIVE BUREAU

(610) 278-3090

(610) 278-3095

(610) 278-3368

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

17-YEAR-OLD GUN TRAFFICKER CERTIFIED TO STAND TRIAL AS ADULT, FACING MORE THAN 160 FELONY CHARGES

Rahajahi Taylor Batchelor of Norristown joins nine other adult defendants in the criminal case that involved 44 illegal straw purchases of firearms



RAHAJAH BACHELOR

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (Nov. 30, 2020) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele and Norristown Police Chief Mark E. Talbot announce the certification of Rahajahi Taylor Batchelor, 17, of Norristown, to stand trial as an adult. He faces numerous felony charges related to his leadership role in the gun trafficking organization that illegally obtained and resold 44 firearms in Montgomery, Bucks and Philadelphia counties during July and August of this year.

Batchelor joins nine adults previously charged in late September for their roles in the gun trafficking organization: Terrance Barker, Jamil Brown, Clarence Codada, Demetrius Huggins Jr., Shaireese Liles, Anthony McCrary, and John McDonald, all of Philadelphia; Ashon Pearson of Norristown; and Mikal Scott of Cheltenham. Four other juvenile males, ages 14 to 17 years, were involved in the gun trafficking organization but to a lesser extent than Batchelor, and the District Attorney's Office did not seek to certify them as adults.

Batchelor was certified as an adult before Judge Cheryl Austin following a lengthy hearing in Juvenile Court on Nov. 24, 2020. The Commonwealth presented evidence of the severity and sophistication of the crimes, the impact of these crimes on the

community of Norristown as well as the entire Philadelphia region and the defendant's prior contact with law enforcement. The defendant faces 166 felony counts of Corrupt Organization, Conspiracy, Dealing in the Proceeds of Unlawful Activities, Illegal Sale or Transfer of Firearms and Criminal Use of a Communications Facility, as well as 21 misdemeanor counts of Possession of a Firearm by a Minor.

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 Suburban Community Hospital for a report of a gunshot victim, which was Batchelor. The Norristown Police investigation determined that Batchelor had accidentally shot himself in his arm inside a his family's residence on Green Street in Norristown. Inside the residence, police found two gun boxes that had been purchased on the day of the shooting by McCrary, who is Batchelor's cousin but 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. Of the 44 firearms that were found to be straw purchases for the organization, only nine have been recovered by police to date.

"This 17-year-old was one of the ringleaders that orchestrated the straw purchases of 44 firearms by three adults and then illegally sold those firearms to people who could not legally buy firearms for themselves. This defendant, along with his co-conspirators, has done a tremendous amount of damage to the safety of our community here in Montgomery County and in the greater southeastern Pennsylvania region," said DA Steele.

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).

Detectives from the Montgomery County Detective Bureau and Norristown Police Department are still pursuing the recovery of the other 35 guns. Anyone with

information about these illegal guns is asked to call the Montgomery County Detective Bureau at 610-278-3368 or the Norristown Police Department at 610-270-0977.

According to Juvenile Court rules, the certification hearing serves as the preliminary hearing for the defendant. Following the presentation of evidence at the certification hearing, Judge Austin ordered the case to be transferred to the Court of Common Pleas. She set bail at \$250,000 cash, and the defendant was remanded. Batchelor is currently being housed at the Lehigh County Prison, which can accommodate housing a 17-year-old away from older prisoners.

The case is being 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.