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ASHCROFT ANNOUNCES VIOLENCE REDUCTION INITIATIVE FOR COLUMBUS

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- A commitment by local, state and federal law enforcement agencies has led to United States Attorney General John Ashcroft's initiation of the Violent Crime Impact Team (VCIT) in Columbus.

“In Columbus and across the nation the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) is serving as the lead investigative agency in this initiative and is once again working with its federal and local partners to reduce gun violence in the community,” said Gregory Lockhart, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio.

The Columbus Division of Police under the leadership of Chief James Jackson and Franklin County Prosecutor Ron O'Brien are leading this initiative for local agencies in the area.

Other agencies that will contribute manpower and expertise to the VCIT are the Franklin County Sheriff's Office, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation in Attorney General Jim Petro's Office, and the Ohio Adult Parole Authority.

“A repeat criminal who is arrested in possession of a firearm can face a mandatory minimum of 15 years in federal prison with no probation and no parole. Our message is simple: gun crime equals hard time,” said Christopher Sadowski, ATF Special Agent in Charge in Ohio and Indiana.

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“We know that more than half the homicides nationally are committed by someone with a prior record of violent crime. If we focus on keeping guns out of the hands of violent or repeat offenders, we can make our communities safer,” Lockhart said.

“Our goal in working with the U.S. Attorney’s Office over the next six months will be to concentrate the full force of federal and state prosecution against violent criminals on the streets and to support the work of the law enforcement team in our efforts to reduce violent crime in Columbus,” O’Brien said.

“Our team will use every legal weapon we have to do this. We will identify areas of the city where residents are suffering from violent crime. We will track down violent fugitives, punish those who buy and sell guns illegally on the streets, arrest those with gun-related probation violations, and my office will adopt for federal prosecution more local gun cases when federal punishment is harsher than that they would receive in state court.”

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