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GUN TRAFFICKING RING DISMANTLED
WITH ARRESTS OF VIRGINIA MAN AND THREE QUEENS RESIDENTS
FOLLOWING LONG-TERM INVESTIGATION

*Crew Allegedly Sold Firearms in Queens That Were Purchased in Southern State;
Police Confiscated 23 Handguns, High Capacity Ammo Feeders and Cache of Bullets;
Defendants Face Up to 25 Years in Prison if Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz, joined by New York City Police Commissioner Dermot Shea, today announced the arrests of four alleged gun traffickers who used the notorious Iron Pipeline and smuggle guns purchased in Virginia to be sold illegally on the streets of Queens County. Police removed nearly two dozen deadly weapons from our neighborhoods, along with high capacity magazines and ammunition over the duration of the 10-month-long investigation.

District Attorney Katz said, “New York City has seen a disturbing spike in shootings over the last few weeks. Combating this dangerous rise in gun violence, means cutting off the supply of illegal guns coming into our neighborhoods. Illegal gun traffickers put every citizen in our borough at grave risk. I want to thank the NYPD’s Firearm Suppression Section for their relentless pursuit and acknowledge the great work of my team for their tireless efforts.”

Police Commissioner Shea said, “This case reflects the NYPD’s efforts to stop illegal firearms from reaching New York City’s streets. Our NYPD detectives, and law enforcement partners, remain vigilant in our work to keep these weapons out of the hands of criminals where they threaten all of our communities.”

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Jessica “Cess Milla” Heyliger, 35, of Jamaica, Queens; Laquan Benson, 36, of Richmond, Virginia; Mitchell “Mitxh” Myree, 36, of Jamaica, Queens; and Sharod “Yayo” King, 32, of Woodside, Queens. The defendants have variously been charged with criminal sale of a firearm, criminal possession of a weapon and conspiracy. **(See Addendum for further details on defendants).**

The complaints allege that the ring operated with Heyliger as the principal dealer of the weapons – Benson as her main supplier and Myree acting as a backup. King allegedly was Heyliger’s salesman.

The investigation began in September 2019, when an undercover police officer allegedly purchased a handgun and two large capacity ammunition feeding devices from defendant King in Queens County. In December 2019, the Court authorized electronic surveillance on defendant King's cell phone. Upon taking office in January 2020, DA Katz expanded the investigation to include the trafficker who brought these firearms into the borough.

According to the complaints, the defendants allegedly sold an undercover police officer a total of 23 guns during 13 separate transactions. As part of the conspiracy, DA Katz said, King communicated directly with a buyer - actually an undercover police officer - and delivered firearms, large capacity magazines and ammunition to that "buyer." Most of the illegal sales occurred in and around Astoria, Queens. Heyliger is accused of providing all of the weapons and ammo to King.

All but two of the weapons sold by Heyliger and King to the undercover officer were allegedly supplied by Benson, who mainly acquired the guns through the internet - using a classified advertisement website with sections devoted to the sale of firearms. The investigation revealed that Benson would use an alias and make deals with private firearms re-sellers in Virginia. These guns were then transported to New York City and delivered to Heyliger in Queens, according to the charges.

DA Katz said, the defendants allegedly sold the undercover officer hundreds of rounds of ammunition and more than 10 high-capacity magazines. The "buyer" was able to purchase the following firearms:

- a pair of .40 caliber Taurus pistols
- a 9mm Smith and Wesson pistol
- a .380 caliber Remington Arms pistol
- a 9mm Sig Sauer pistol
- a pair of 9mm Taurus pistols
- a 9mm Keltec pistol
- a pair of .40 caliber Smith and Wesson pistols
- a pair of 9mm Kahr pistol
- a pair of .357 caliber Taurus revolvers
- a defaced 9mm Intratec Tec-9 firearm
- a .22 caliber Phoenix Arms pistol
- a .38 caliber Taurus revolver
- a .32 caliber N. Amer. Arms pistol
- a .40 caliber Bersa pistol
- a 9mm Ruger pistol
- a .380 caliber Ruger pistol
- a pair of 9mm SCCY pistols

"With the recent increase in shootings, I am more determined than ever to stop gun violence," DA Katz said. "Those who profit from selling guns illegally are merchants of death and mayhem. Each gun removed from the streets of Queens represents a tragedy that has been averted."

She recently created the Violent Criminal Enterprises Bureau to aggressively target gun traffickers who bring firearms into Queens County. Pursuing and prosecuting those who use the Iron Pipeline will cut

off access to gang members and other violent criminals.

“Lowering the demand for illegal guns must also be part of the answer to stop the bloodshed,” DA Katz said. “I am committed to working within the community with non-profit groups and faith-based organizations to create opportunities for young people, provide educational programs and empower youths to make better decisions for their future. We cannot, however, only prosecute our way out of this crisis. The answer must include community involvement and participation.”

The investigation was conducted by New York City Police Department Detective David Joel, with the assistance of Detective Brian McCloskey, under the supervision of Sergeant Brian O’Hanlon, Lieutenant Michael Whelan and Commanding Officer Captain Jonathan Korabel, under the supervision of Firearms Suppression Section Commanding Officer Deputy Inspector Brian Gill, and the overall supervision of Gun Violence Suppression Division Commanding Officer Inspector Richard Green.

Assisting in the investigation, and now prosecuting the case is Assistant District Attorney Ajay Chheda, Section Chief of the District Attorney’s Violent Criminal Enterprises Bureau, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Mark Katz, Deputy Bureau Chief, and Assistant District Attorney Jonathan R. Sennett, VCE Bureau Chief, under the overall supervision of Gerard Brave, Executive Assistant District Attorney in charge of Investigations.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at www.queensda.org

ADDENDUM

JESSICA HEYLIGER, 35, of Jamaica, Queens, was arraigned on July 21, 2020, before Queens Criminal Court Judge Joanne Watters on a criminal complaint charging her with criminal sale of a firearm in the first and third degree, criminal possession of a weapon in the second and third degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree and unlawful possession of pistol or revolver ammunition. The defendant’s next court date is scheduled for July 24, 2020. Heyliger faces up to 25 years in prison, if convicted. Defendant is currently represented by Mr. Scott Bookstein, Esq.

LAQUAN BENSON, 36, of Richmond, Virginia, is pending arraignment on a criminal complaint charging him with criminal sale of a firearm in the first and third degree, criminal possession of weapon in the second and third degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree and unlawful possession of pistol or revolver ammunition. The defendant is currently awaiting extradition from Virginia. Benson faces up to 25 years in prison, if convicted.

MITCHELL MYREE, 36, of Jamaica, Queens was arraigned on July 21, 2020, before Queens Criminal Court Judge Joanne Watters on a complaint charging him with criminal possession of a weapon in the second and third degree, criminal sale of a firearm in the third degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree and unlawful possession of pistol or revolver ammunition. The defendant’s next court date is scheduled for

July 24, 2020. Myree faces up to 15 years in prison, if convicted. Defendant is represented by Ms. Theodora Saal, Esq.

SHAROD KING, 32, of Woodside, Queens was arraigned July 21, 2020, before Queens Criminal Court Judge Joanne Watters on a complaint charging him criminal sale of a firearm in the first and third degree, criminal possession of a weapon in the second and third degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree and unlawful possession of pistol or revolver ammunition. The defendant's next court date is scheduled for Friday, July 24, 2020. King faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted. Defendant is represented by Queens Defenders.

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