



U. S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney
Northern District of Illinois

Patrick J. Fitzgerald
United States Attorney

Federal Building
219 South Dearborn Street, Fifth Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60604
(312) 353-5300

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www.usdoj.gov/usao/iln

PRESS CONTACTS:
AUSA Jake Ryan (312)886-7629
AUSA Monika Bickert (312)886-4129
Asst. PIO Kimberly Nerheim (312) 353-5489

U.S. CHARGES 47 ALLEGED MICKEY COBRA GANG LEADERS AND ASSOCIATES IN CONSPIRACY TO DISTRIBUTE DRUGS IN THE DEARBORN HOMES

CHICAGO – A criminal complaint unsealed today charged 47 members and associates of the Mickey Cobras street gang, including **James Austin**, 29, of Akron, Ohio, the alleged Mickey Cobras' "King", with operating a sophisticated, long-running narcotics distribution organization. The organization controlled sales of heroin and other drugs in a large portion of the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) Dearborn Homes, an 800-unit public housing development located between 27th and 30th streets and State and Federal Streets on Chicago's South Side. In addition to heroin, the drugs alleged to have been distributed by the organization include crack cocaine, marijuana, and fentanyl.

The complaint alleges that the Mickey Cobras formed during the 1960's under the name "Cobrastones." In the late 1960's, the Cobrastones became part of the "Black P Stone Nation," a coalition of smaller street gangs. In the early 1970's, Mickey Cogwell, a Cobrastone, became a leader for the Black P Stone Nation. In 1976, a power struggle erupted between other gang members and Mickey Cogwell over control of the Black P Stone Nation. During the ensuing gang-war,

Mickey Cogwell was shot and killed. Following Mickey Cogwell's death, the gang members loyal to the Cobrastones changed their gang's name to the "Mickey Cobras."

The defendants charged represent all levels of the organization, from the gang's top leadership down to street sellers and security workers. In addition to Austin, other top Mickey Cobras leaders charged in the complaint are **Johnny Shannon**, 27, of Chicago, Austin's chief assistant, and two members of the Mickey Cobras Board of Directors – **Larry Smith**, 31 of Chicago, and **Lynn Barksdale**, 32, of Chicago. Also among those charged was **Tashika Sledge**, 29, of Chicago, a Chicago Police Department officer with a personal relationship with Barksdale, who allegedly provided law enforcement information and other assistance to Barksdale in furtherance of the drug operation.

Early this morning, over 400 law enforcement officers from the Drug Enforcement Administration and Chicago Police Department began making arrests and executing search warrants in connection with the investigation. By late this morning, at least 29 of the 47 defendants were in custody, including 8 who had been previously arrested.

Before today's arrests, approximately 4 kilos of heroin, as well as approximately 309 grams of fentanyl, cash, and numerous firearms were seized or purchased during the investigation, code-named *Operation Snakebite*. The probe, which began in 1999 and includes agents from the Internal Revenue Service and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives as well as the DEA and CPD, is part of a sustained, coordinated effort by local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to dismantle Chicago's highly-organized, and violent, drug-trafficking street gangs. The investigation employed undercover police officers and DEA agents, numerous wiretaps, cooperating witnesses, and a steady progression of searches and seizures of evidence.

The drug distribution operation described in the complaint was notable for its scope and marketing tactics. The complaint alleges that the Mickey Cobras sold large quantities of heroin in the Dearborn Homes by marketing different brands, or “lines,” of heroin that used distinctive packaging, various recipes for mixing the heroin with other substances, and different brand names – among them “Reaper,” “Penicillin,” “Drop Dead,” “Lethal Injection” and “Renegade.” According to the complaint, anyone seeking to sell a line of heroin in the portion of the Dearborn Homes controlled by the Mickey Cobras had to first obtain permission from defendant Austin and members of the Mickey Cobras “Board of Directors.” Everyone who received this permission, with the exception of the highest-ranking gang leaders, was also required to pay a street tax for permission to operate the line. According to the complaint, Austin personally ran two of the most profitable lines of heroin, “Reaper” and “Pencilin,” which generated a total of \$20,000 to \$25,000 per day in revenue.

The complaint alleges that the defendants sold heroin 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the Dearborn Homes, with shifts of workers, including some as young as 13. Drug sales were protected by an extensive security apparatus, which, as one cooperating defendant explained, was designed to minimize the disruption from the police and keep the profits flowing. Another witness explained that two security workers would be positioned in front of a building where heroin sales were taking place and two in the rear, while another stood on the first floor and patted down heroin buyers and directed them to the floor where drug sales were taking place. That floor in turn was protected by an armed security guard. In addition, a “rover” would walk around all of the buildings where the Mickey Cobras were selling heroin to report on law enforcement activity in the complex,

as well as when sellers needed to be resupplied with heroin. If law enforcement was spotted in the vicinity of one building, sales would be moved to another building controlled by the Mickey Cobras.

In addition to the gang's top leadership, and security workers, other defendants charged in the complaint allegedly included: operators of their own heroin "lines;" "mixers" who cut and packaged heroin; shift supervisors; line sellers; and "runners" responsible for resupplying sellers and transporting money. Austin and the other leaders of the gang allegedly enforced their rule through threats of violence, backed by numerous firearms to which the Mickey Cobras had access.

Sledge, a CPD officer assigned to the 21st District, which includes the Dearborn Homes, allegedly assisted Mickey Cobras Board of Directors member Lynn Barksdale, with the sale of marijuana and in hiding Barksdale's marijuana distribution paraphernalia to keep it from being seized by CPD. In addition, she is alleged to have used her access to law enforcement databases to assist Barksdale in determining whether Mickey Cobra members were under law enforcement scrutiny and determining whether vehicles following Barksdale belonged to law enforcement. The complaint also alleges that Sledge was intercepted on a wiretap disclosing to Barksdale that he and Austin were the subjects of a CPD investigative alert and were wanted for questioning. In reality, the investigative alert disclosed by Sledge was a ruse and had been created by officers participating in this investigation, including CPD's Internal Affairs Division.

Although the complaint alleges that the Mickey Cobras' principal line of business at the Dearborn Homes was the sale of heroin, it also alleges that law enforcement officers on two occasions during the investigation seized quantities of fentanyl and immediately arrested the sellers. The first fentanyl seizure is alleged to have taken place on January 25, 2006, when CPD officers observed defendant **Lukas McGee**, 19, of Chicago, carry a large plastic bag into the lobby of a

Dearborn Homes apartment building where the Mickey Cobras were actively selling heroin. McGee allegedly dropped the bag and fled into the building, where he was arrested. CPD officers recovered the plastic bag McGee had dropped, and found 431 small zip lock bags, as well as a larger plastic bag, all containing a substance that was later determined to be approximately 119 grams of fentanyl. The second incident is alleged to have occurred on April 25, 2006, when a CPD officer observed defendant **Jerome Johnson**, 21, of Chicago, leave an apartment in one of the Dearborn Homes buildings that an informant had identified as a place where heroin was packaged for street sales. The officer arrested Johnson, who was carrying two plastic bags later found to contain more than 30 grams of fentanyl. A subsequent search of the apartment he had left yielded 160 additional grams of fentanyl, as well as mixing devices and packaging material. Both McGee and Johnson were charged by the Cook County State's Attorney's Office for the discrete events leading up to their arrests and have now also been charged in the federal conspiracy complaint unsealed today.

Mr. Shapiro said, "Law enforcement works best when law enforcement agencies work in a cooperative, coordinated matter. Our efforts to rid the city and suburbs of the curse of gangs, drugs and violence are – as this investigation is proving – dramatically enhanced by the synergy of the talents and resources that local and federal law enforcement can bring to the table.

"The Chicago Police Department's unmatched collection and analysis of gang intelligence, in combination with the experience and sophisticated tools of the Drug Enforcement Administration and other federal law enforcement agencies and the formidable federal drug penalties, demonstrate that we can continue to reduce the impact and dangers of gangs on everyone who must live in their midst."

Mr. Shapiro announced the charges together with Timothy Ogden, Associate Special Agent in Charge of the Chicago office of the DEA; Philip J. Cline, Superintendent of the Chicago Police Department; Byram W. Tichenor, Special Agent in Charge of the Chicago office of the IRS; and Andrew L. Traver, Special Agent in Charge of the Chicago office the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,

Firearms, and Explosives. This case was supported by the High Intensity Drug Trafficking area. Funding to support this investigation was provided by the Public Housing Safety Initiative, a grant offered by the Department of Justice, Community Capacity Development Office. Remaining funds will be used to supplement social services for the youth in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Associate Special Agent in Charge Odgen remarked, “The Mickey Cobras had a stranglehold over the residents of the Dearborn Homes. Today we have allowed them to breathe again.”

Superintendent Cline added, “Today’s successful mission illustrates how determined our Narcotics and Gang Investigation Section is to take criminal operations out of play. It also illustrates another facet to law enforcement that challenges the Chicago Police on a daily basis, and that is integrity, honesty and a commitment to respect and honor the badge of authority that comes with the job.”

All 47 defendants were charged with conspiracy to possess and distribute heroin, crack cocaine, marijuana, and fentanyl from 1999 to the present. All of the defendants taken into federal custody yesterday are scheduled to have an initial appearance at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow before U.S. Magistrate Judge Martin Ashman in Courtroom 2541 in U.S. District Court. A list of the defendants, broken out by the roles they allegedly played in the conspiracy, follows.

Mickey Cobras Leaders

James Austin (“King” of the Mickey Cobras), also known as “Jaymo,” 29, of Akron, OH
Johnny Shannon (principal assistant to Austin), aka “Boo C” and “Boosie,” 27, of Chicago
Larry Smith (member of Board of Directors), aka “Lucky” and “Lujack,” 31, of Chicago
Lynn Barksdale (member of Board of Directors), aka “Insane,” 32, of Chicago

Controlled Own Heroin Lines

Antonio Stidhum, aka “Psycho” and “Hitman,” 29, of Chicago
Freddie Westmoreland, aka “Stokes,” 29, of Chicago
Duante Falls, aka “Shitty,” “Doodoo,” and “Dunate,” 23, of Chicago
Bernard Howard, aka “Trigg” and “Ru,” 28, of Chicago
Marshall Wooden, aka “Chuckwick,” 30, of Chicago
Charles Hampton, aka “Mo-Money,” 31, of Chicago
Demetrius Brownridge, aka “Little Mickey,” 24, of Chicago
Nick Jones, aka “Poohnannie,” 33, of Chicago

Suppliers

Rasheed Keshiro, aka “Sheed,” 35, of Chicago
Israel Moore, aka “Pretty Ricky” and “Lookout,” 28, of Chicago
Derrick Campbell, aka “Dino,” 39, of Chicago
Kevin Thomas, aka “Money C,” 37, of Katy, TX
Stephen Akingba, aka “David,” 41, of Chicago
Joseph Boone, aka “Little Maurice,” 26, of Chicago

Shift Supervisors

Kevin Williams, aka “Nickle Bag,” 25, of Chicago
Jerome Johnson, aka “Little Marcus,” 21, of Chicago
Tyrone Wallace, aka “Taz” and “Juvie,” 26, of Chicago
Antonio Shannon, aka “Montana,” 26, of Chicago
Saundra Falls, aka “Mama,” 44, of Chicago
Johnny Tiger, aka “Tig,” 45, of Chicago

Transporters

Robin Johnson, aka “Pathfinder,” “Path,” and “Pierre,” 45, of Chicago
Antwan Peterson, aka “Droopy,” 28, of Chicago
Rashad Hamilton, aka “Ray Ray,” 20, of Chicago
Aaron Smith, aka “Ace,” 25, of Chicago
Anthony Binion, aka “BK,” 45, of Harvey, IL
Davone Shannon, 20, of Chicago
Arthur Hearon, aka “Little A” and “Little Art,” 21, of Chicago
Frank Harris, aka “Knuckles,” 23, of Chicago
Davarius Seaton, aka “Ugly Snake” and “D,” 24, of Chicago

Workers

Joseph Chess, aka “Jo Jo,” 40, of Chicago
Cynthia Thomas, aka “Country,” 38, of Chicago
Anthony Smith, aka “Moo Maw,” 21, of Chicago
Sean Winn, 18, of Chicago
Penorris Brownridge, aka “PJ,” 24, of Chicago
Lukas McGee, 19, of Chicago
Paul Hatchett, 48, of Chicago
Robbie Sykes, 46, of Chicago
Mark Franklin, aka “Marco,” 27, of Chicago
Andre Hastings, aka “Dre,” 30, of Chicago
Nicole Froehlig, 28, of Chicago
Joseph Pearson, 32, of Chicago
Prince Coleman, 28, of Chicago

CPD Officer Assisting Drug Conspiracy

Tashika Sledge, 29, of Chicago

If convicted of the single count of narcotics conspiracy charged in the complaint, each defendant faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment without parole and a maximum fine of \$4 million. Note, however, that the Court would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The government is being represented by Assistant United States Attorneys Jake Ryan, Monika Bickert, and Valarie Hays.

The public is reminded that a complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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