



ANTHONY G. BROWN, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Nine Members and Associates of a West Baltimore Drug-Trafficking Organization Are Indicted** *Charges Against Members of Criminal Organization Known as “Wick Squad” Stem from Long-Term Group Violence Reduction Strategy Investigation*

**BALTIMORE, MD (January 23, 2023)** – Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown today announced nine Baltimore men have been charged in connection with a long-term investigation in West Baltimore City. Charges in the indictments include illegal possession of firearms, distribution of Fentanyl, and distribution of cocaine. The investigation was led by the Baltimore Police Department’s Group Violence Unit and the Maryland Office of the Attorney General’s Organized Crime Unit, and was a coordinated effort under the Maryland Criminal Intelligence Network (MCIN) and the Baltimore Group Violence Reduction Strategy.

In April 2022, the Maryland Office of the Attorney General and the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) began a joint investigation into the members and associates of a drug-trafficking organization known as “Wick Squad,” which operated in and around the 2500 block of Edmondson Avenue in West Baltimore. The investigation utilized a variety of investigative methods, including the use of undercover BPD detectives to make controlled purchases of narcotics, including Fentanyl. The investigation culminated in search warrants and arrests in October 2022. The most recent arrest took place in January 2023. In total, the investigation led to the seizure of 11 firearms and large amounts of controlled dangerous substances (CDS), ammunition, and packaging material.

The recent indictments include:

Jermaud Harris, 34, of Baltimore, is charged in a 40-count indictment, including charges of illegal possession of a regulated firearm with a disqualifying conviction, distribution of Fentanyl, and possession of a firearm with a nexus to a drug trafficking crime. Harris is being held without bail and has a trial date in May 2023.

Dernell Faulkner, 33, of Baltimore, is charged in a 34-count indictment, including charges of distribution of Fentanyl and illegal possession of ammunition. Faulkner has a trial date in May 2023.

Jermal Thompson, 32, of Baltimore, is charged in an 8-count indictment, including charges of possession of a firearm with a nexus to a drug trafficking crime and possession with intent to distribute Cocaine. Thompson has a trial date in May 2023.

Tevin Holmes, 31, of Baltimore, is charged in a 7-count indictment, including charges of illegal possession of a regulated firearm and distribution of Cocaine. Holmes is being held without bail and has an arraignment date in February 2023.

Justin Gregory, 30, of Baltimore, is charged in an 8-count indictment, including charges of conspiracy to distribute controlled dangerous substances, possession with intent to distribute CDS, illegal possession of ammunition, and possession of CDS production equipment. Gregory has a trial date in May 2023.

Devon McKoy, 31, of Lynchburg, Virginia, is charged in a 2-count indictment, including a charge of possession with intent to distribute Cocaine. McKoy is being held without bail and has a trial date in May 2023.

In addition to the above-listed indictments, three cases were charged earlier in 2022 while the broader investigation was still ongoing. All three of those cases have already resulted in convictions:

On December 6, 2022, Jerome Lewis, 35, of Baltimore, pled guilty before the Honorable Melissa Phinn of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City to illegal possession of a regulated firearm with a disqualifying conviction and possession with intent to distribute Fentanyl. Lewis was sentenced to 12 years of incarceration, suspending all but five years to be served without parole. Upon his release from incarceration, he will be on three years of supervised probation.

On December 6, 2022, Arthur Beard, 29, of Baltimore, pled guilty before the Honorable Kendra Y. Ausby of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City to loaded handgun on person and possession of CDS. Beard was sentenced to four years of incarceration, suspending all but three years. Upon his release from incarceration, he will be on two years of supervised probation.

On December 8, 2022, James Jones, 29, of Baltimore, pled guilty before the Honorable Melissa Phinn of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City to loaded handgun on person and possession with intent to distribute Fentanyl. Jones was sentenced to 20 years of incarceration, suspending all but three years. Upon his release from incarceration, he will be on three years of supervised probation.

“With these indictments, nine violent criminals can no longer pose a threat to public safety and disrupt the communities in which they operated,” said Attorney General Brown. “This case represents just the beginning of our plan to strategically target organized crime and reduce drug trafficking and gun violence. With an expanded Organized Crime Unit, our office will take more criminals off the streets and make Maryland safer for all.”

“This case is just the latest in a series of operations that illustrates our progress with and commitment to the Group Violence Reduction Strategy. We are singularly focused on reducing the number of homicides and non-fatal shootings in our city,” said Commissioner Michael Harrison. “This success of this strategy hinges on multiple partnerships, the use of all the tools available in both our short- and long-term crime strategies and a holistic approach to steer violent offenders away from the culture of violence.”

“This is an example of our Group Violence Reduction Strategy in action,” said Mayor Brandon M. Scott. “Imprisonment should not be a first resort, but if people decide that they are going to deny the opportunities on the table and continue down the path of crime and violence, we are going to hold them accountable with swift, certain, and legitimate consequences. I want to thank Attorney General Brown and our law enforcement personnel for helping make Baltimore a safer city.”

“Our work through this strategy and through our violence reduction efforts in Baltimore is deeply rooted in keeping our residents safe, alive and free. Sending young men to prison is not the goal but rather an absolute last resort and the result of the delicate balance of opportunity and consequence,” said Executive Director Shantay Jackson of the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement. “The integrity of this strategy depends on the connectivity and strategic partnership between each arm of GVRS, service provision and law enforcement alike. We look forward to continuing this work to make Baltimore a safer city for all.”

In making today’s announcement, Attorney General Brown thanked Organized Crime Chief Katie Dorian, the brave men and women of the Baltimore Police Department, as well as Senior Assistant Attorney General Jared Albert and Assistant Attorney General Shannon Price, who are prosecuting this case.

Attorney General Brown also thanked Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent in Charge Thomas J. Sobocinski, Howard County Police Chief Gregory J. Der, and State’s Attorney for Baltimore City Ivan J. Bates for their assistance in this investigation.

A criminal indictment is merely an accusation of wrongdoing, and a defendant is presumed innocent until the State proves the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2023/012323.pdf>