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**NEWS RELEASE**

## **METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Service, Integrity, Leadership, and Fair Treatment to All

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### **Metropolitan Police, Federal Agents, and Federal & State Prosecutors Team for Unprecedented Violent Offenders Unit**

Today Chief Dan Isom announced the formation of the Violent Offenders Unit (VOU), an unprecedented collaboration to aggressively investigate, arrest and prosecute the most dangerous criminals in our community.

Overall violent crime in the city of St. Louis declined by 3.5% in 2008, but homicides increased by 21%. In 2002, the Department formed a program to target violent offenders, staffed by 8 police officers. However, with the increase in homicides in 2008, Chief Isom recognized the need to combine resources and intelligence from all areas of law enforcement and the criminal justice system. With the help of partner agencies, the Violent Offenders Unit was formed.

The VOU is staffed by 14 Metropolitan Police Officers, 8 agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), 6 agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF), and 3 agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI.) This 31-person unit will also collaborate with the Department's Homicide Division. The VOU will be based in an undisclosed police property, where they will use computer models to help compile crime data to assist their efforts. They will work undercover in targeted areas known for drug deals and high levels of gang activity. The U.S. Marshals Service will assist in the apprehension of violent offenders. With prosecution by the U.S. Attorney's Office at the Federal level and by the Circuit Attorney's Career Criminal Unit at the State level, the VOU's primary goal is to remove the worst of the worst criminals from our streets.

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The VOU will focus on suspects who meet one or more of the following criteria **AND** are believed to be continuing to commit additional crimes:

- Have previously been arrested for murder
- Have repeatedly been arrested for committing violent crimes with weapons
- Have recently been arrested for committing a violent crime while on probation or parole
- Have multiple felony convictions

At the time of prosecution, the United State's Attorney's Office and the Circuit Attorney's Office will jointly review violent offender cases, pursuing charges that carry the strongest sentences possible, in an effort to punish violent offenders and protect the community.

Chief Dan Isom said, "The VOU will afford us the opportunity to track and quickly arrest the most heartless criminals. This is not about those citizens who have previously been convicted of a crime but have now turned their lives around. It's about the repeat offenders, who, arrest after arrest, jail sentence after prison sentence, continue to terrorize our neighborhoods with their criminal activities."

Circuit Attorney Jennifer Joyce said, "The formation of the VOU is a perfect complement to the Circuit Attorney's Career Criminal Unit that was established in 2007. The collective power of the law enforcement agencies involved in this initiative should give pause to those who believe they can wreak havoc without consequences. It's time for justice."

United States Attorney Catherine Hanaway said, "The U.S. Attorney's Office welcomes this initiative by Chief Isom and offers its full support to the dedicated and hard working members of the Metropolitan Police Department, the federal agencies associated with the Violent Offenders Unit and the Circuit Attorney's Office. This collaboration of resources should allow for streamlined and effective prosecutions of the most violent criminals who continuously prey on our community."

The groundwork for the VOU is laid and it will become an official Department Unit after being approved by the Board of Police Commissioners at the January 21<sup>st</sup> meeting.