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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NORRISTOWN MAN ARRESTED AFTER PURCHASING, ILLEGALLY SELLING 16 FIREARMS



JOHNNY FOWLER

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (Dec. 15, 2021) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele, in partnership with Department of Justice, Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' (ATF) Field Divisions in Philadelphia, New York and New Jersey, announce the arrest of Johnny Fowler, 28, of Pottstown, on multiple felony charges related to the straw purchasing and trafficking of 16 firearms from 2014 to 2019.

The investigation by the Montgomery County Detective Bureau's Violent Crimes Unit (VCU) and multiple federal, state and local partners began after Philadelphia Police seized a firearm during a traffic stop on Aug. 11, 2021 from a person who was not legally allowed to own a firearm due to a prior felony conviction. Philadelphia Police traced the firearm, found that it was purchased by Fowler and referred the case to Montgomery County Detectives. County detectives found that Fowler began purchasing firearms on Aug. 8, 2014, soon after his 21st birthday and to date, has purchased 16 firearms that have been found to be straw purchases. A "straw purchase" is when a person with a clean background purchases firearms specifically on behalf of another person to conceal the true ownership of the firearm. Persons who

are unable to legally purchase a firearm would include convicted felons, domestic violence misdemeanants, juveniles and mentally ill individuals.

VCU detectives investigated Fowler's firearms purchases using the Electronic Record of Sale (EROS) system and by going through hard copies of ATF and Pennsylvania State Police forms at gun stores. The investigation found that from Aug. 8, 2014 to April 10, 2019, Fowler purchased 18 firearms from gun shops in three counties—16 of which were considered straw purchases.

Of the 16 firearms purchased by Fowler, three firearms have been recovered by police:

On May 29, 2018, NYPD recovered a Smith & Wesson 9 mm semi-automatic firearm with an obliterated serial number during a traffic stop that involved four men too young to legally purchase firearms. NYPD recovered the serial number and found the gun was purchased by Fowler on June 18, 2016. NYPD also found the firearm had been used in shooting in Brooklyn on Oct. 10, 2017.

On Nov. 15, 2019, Pleasantville (N.J.) Police responded to a shooting at a high school football game where a juvenile was shot and killed and an adult was shot in the chest but lived. The adult victim, who was a person not able to legally possess a firearm, had on his person a loaded Taurus semi-automatic firearm with an obliterated serial number. (This gun was not fired during the high school football incident.) Police were able to recover the serial number and found that the gun had been purchased by Fowler on Nov. 20, 2018.

On Aug. 11, 2021, Philadelphia Police seized a loaded Springfield .40 caliber semi-automatic firearm during a traffic stop from a person who was not legally allowed to own a firearm due to a prior felony conviction. The firearm was purchased by Fowler on Jan. 9, 2019.

Also significant to this investigation was that Fowler falsely reported to West Pottsgrove Police that seven firearms he purchased were stolen. He reported the firearms stolen on April 25, 2019, a day after ATF agents contacted him and interviewed him about his gun purchasing activity. Fowler reported that the guns were stolen from the trunk of his car on April 22, 2019. Included in the seven guns reported by Fowler as stolen was the firearm recovered by the NYPD almost a full year prior.

“This defendant was arming criminals, plain and simple. The recovery by law enforcement of three of the 16 straw purchased firearms show how far these illegal guns can travel and how they show up at crime scenes,” said Steele. “Straw purchasers like Fowler need to be stopped in order to stop the arming of criminals. We need to have stronger tracking and reporting mechanisms in place to be able to flag this type of behavior in order to stop this flow of firearms onto the streets, making us all less safe.”

The Montgomery County Detective Bureau's Violent Crime Unit (VCU) worked this investigation with assistance from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the FBI Bucks and Montgomery County Safe Streets Task Force; Philadelphia Police Department; Pottstown Police Department; West Pottsgrove

Township Police Department; Pleasantville (N.J.) Police Department; and the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

Fowler was charged with multiple felony counts of Unlawful Transfer of a Firearm, Corrupt Organizations, Dealing in Proceeds of Unlawful Activities, Criminal Use of Communications Facilities, Unsworn Falsification, Materially False Statements and multiple related offenses. He was arraigned on Dec. 11, 2021 before Magisterial District Judge Scott T. Palladino, who set bail at \$1 million cash. Under the new Pre-Trial Services Program, there was a bail review hearing on Dec. 13, 2021 before the Honorable Garrett D. Page, who reduced Fowler's bail to \$500,000 cash. The defendant was unable to make bail and was remanded to the Montgomery County Correctional Facility. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m., Dec. 23, 2021 before Judge Palladino.

The case will be prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Allison Ruth, Captain of the Firearms Unit.

Approved for release:

Kevin R. Steele

CRIMINAL CHARGES, AND ANY DISCUSSION THEREOF, ARE MERELY ALLEGATIONS AND ALL DEFENDANTS ARE PRESUMED INNOCENT UNTIL AND UNLESS PROVEN GUILTY.