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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONDAY JANUARY 27, 2003

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THREE CHICAGO POLICE OFFICERS INDICTED IN ALLEGED DRUG CONSPIRACY

CHICAGO -- Three Chicago Police Department officers – a detective and two one-time tactical patrol officers – surrendered today to federal authorities after being indicted for allegedly conspiring to possess and distribute cocaine. One of the officers admitted the charges this morning in entering a guilty plea at his arraignment in Federal Court, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. The indictment alleges – and the one officer admitted – that the three of them conspired in 1998 and 1999 to take seven kilograms of cocaine and a firearm hidden in an automobile in a police impound lot, and then agreed to keep for themselves, and later sell, five of the kilograms and the firearm. The officers allegedly inventoried the remaining two kilograms and caused an individual to be wrongfully charged with possessing that cocaine.

The single-count indictment, which was returned by a federal grand jury on Jan. 23 and unsealed today, stems from the investigation of former Chicago Police Officer Joseph Miedzianowski, who was sentenced on Jan. 24 to life in prison for running a cocaine distribution conspiracy involving some two dozen co-defendants, including his ex-partner John Galligan. Mr. Fitzgerald announced the charges together with Thomas J. Kneir, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Terry Hillard, Superintendent of the

Chicago Police Department. The investigation, which was conducted jointly by the FBI and the Police Department's Internal Affairs Division, is continuing, they said.

The defendants, each charged with one count of conspiracy to possess distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine, are as follows:

- **Jon F. Woodall**, 40, of Chicago, a Chicago Police Officer since 1990 and a Detective since 1995, who was assigned to Area 5 at the time of alleged conspiracy;
- **Peter L. Matich**, 40, of Chicago, a Chicago Police Officer since 1994, who was assigned to a tactical unit in the 25th Police District (Grand-Central) at the time of the alleged conspiracy; and
- **James B. Benson**, 34, of Chicago, a Chicago Police Officer since 1991, who was assigned to a tactical unit in the 25th Police District at the time of the alleged conspiracy.

All three officers were reassigned to restricted duty in July 1999. Benson, who is cooperating with the government, was released on his own recognizance after pleading guilty to the indictment at his arraignment this morning before U.S. District Judge John Darrah. Sentencing for Benson was deferred. Woodall and Matich were set to be arraigned at 2:00 p.m. today before Judge Darrah.

According to the indictment, the three officers conspired to possess and distribute the cocaine between March 1998 and July 1999. On March 4, 1998, they allegedly removed approximately seven kilograms of cocaine and a firearm that were secreted in a white two-door Buick in a police impound lot at 650 West 83rd St., agreeing to keep for themselves five of the seven kilos. The officers allegedly created police reports falsely representing that the remaining two kilograms of cocaine taken from the Buick had been recovered from a Camaro, and caused the person who was driving the Camaro to be wrongfully charged with possession of those two kilograms of cocaine. Those charges eventually were dropped.

Woodall, Matich and Benson allegedly then sold the five kilograms of cocaine that they had taken from the Buick. According to Benson's written plea agreement, Woodall's share allegedly included two of the five kilograms, and the three officers agreed that each of them would receive \$12,000 from the sale of the three remaining kilograms. Matich allegedly made cash payments totaling \$12,000 to Benson, according the plea agreement.

The indictment also alleges that, approximately three weeks after the Buick was impounded, on March 23, 1998, the person who was driving that car at the time was murdered. Woodall allegedly obstructed the homicide investigation by causing a witness to withhold material information from the investigating officers.

If convicted of the narcotics conspiracy, Woodall and Matich each face a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and a maximum of life in prison, and a maximum fine of \$4 million. Benson faces the same possible maximum sentence, but the under the terms of his plea agreement, he is eligible for a reduced sentence that includes a sentence of incarceration to be determined by the Court. In each case, the Court, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed under the United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The government is being represented by Assistant United States Attorneys Brian P. Netols and John R. Lausch.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. Woodall and Matich 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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