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OPERATION SAFE TRAVEL - BWI

Baltimore, Maryland - United States Attorney Thomas M. DiBiagio announced today the culmination of a four month multi-agency investigation into airport and air transportation safety. The investigation, which was coordinated by the Maryland Anti-Terrorism Task Force, an entity created at the direction of the United States Attorney General on September 17, 2001, examined all persons employed at Baltimore Washington International Airport who have applied for secure area access badges to determine if they made false statements on their security badge applications. The Maryland Anti-Terrorism Task Force examined approximately 15,000 applications in total.

As a result of the Maryland Anti-Terrorism Task Force investigation, ten individuals employed at the airport were charged by indictment with federal offenses. Seven of these were charged with failure to disclose prior felony convictions, something which the airport security badge application required. The following defendants were arrested today and were charged with failure to disclose prior felony convictions: Victoria Delores Thomas, age 35, of Fort Meade; Jenny Latrice Payne, age 34, of Baltimore; Stacey Adella Washington, age 32, of Randallstown; Chandra Valencia Burton, age 44, of Baltimore; Carrold Spencer, age 48, of Baltimore, Maryland and Zachery Emanuel Kesler, age 33, of Baltimore.

In addition, Koffi Zipki, aka Michael Parks Ahorio, approximately 35 years of age, was charged by criminal complaint with violations of 18 U.S.C. § 1001; use of false name and date of birth in a security badge application. Zipki, from Togo, is also under investigation for immigration violations.

Nicola Whittingham, age 27, a Canadian citizen residing in Baltimore, was also placed in INS custody for employment without a work permit. Chijioke Ofo, age 45, a citizen of Nigeria, was placed in INS custody for being in this country illegally and for having a prior drug felony conviction.

In a series of interviews conducted today, twenty-one employees at BWI were questioned about information which they had provided on their security badge applications, including their social security numbers and dates of birth. Some of the persons were questioned by agents of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in order to better establish their legal status within the United States.

"This effort has as its primary focus the safety of the flying public. We are enforcing the federal criminal law and in the process we are also ensuring that only those persons entitled to enter secure areas of the airport are doing so," said Mr. DiBiagio.

The maximum penalties for the misuse of a social security number or failing to disclose prior felony convictions on an airport security badge application is five years imprisonment, three years supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine. An indictment is not a finding of guilt. An individual charged by indictment is presumed innocent of the crime charged unless and until proven guilty at later criminal proceedings.

Mr. DiBiagio extended his appreciation to the agencies which participated in Operation Safe Travel; including the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Inspector General's Office of the Social Security Administration; the Maryland Transportation Authority Police Department; the Immigration and Naturalization Service; the Transportation Security Agency; the U.S. Marshals Service; the

Maryland State Police and the Baltimore City Police Department.

The investigation of those charged with federal criminal offenses is being handled by Assistant United States Attorney Harvey E. Eisenberg.