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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 31, 2018

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\$45,000 in Cocaine Seized by Mercer County Narcotics Task Force

The Mercer County Narcotics Task Force concluded a two-month investigation on Wednesday with two arrests, and the seizure of \$45,000 in cocaine and a handgun, Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri reported.

According to Prosecutor Onofri, during the course of the investigation it was revealed that Nathaniel Bethea traveled to the Newark, NJ area on a regular basis to obtain his supply of cocaine to distribute in the Trenton area. On Wednesday afternoon, members of the MCNTF initiated surveillance of Bethea and Ricqui Watkins as they made such a run to Newark in Bethea's 2014 BMW.

After observing Bethea pick up the cocaine, task force members continued their surveillance, following him directly back to Mercer County and initiating a felony motor vehicle stop after he exited the New Jersey Turnpike for 195 West. As detectives moved in to detain both men, they observed Bethea attempt to put a clear plastic bag into the pocket of his cargo shorts. The bag fell onto the ground as Bethea was removed from his vehicle and revealed 450 grams of suspected cocaine. A search of Bethea revealed \$689 in cash.

Subsequently, officers obtained and executed search warrants for Bethea's home in Hamilton and the cocaine supplier's house in Newark. Detectives located paperwork at Bethea's Emanuel Street residence and in Newark, detectives found a Glock handgun loaded with a 50-round drum magazine, three 30-round magazines and a kilogram press.

Prosecutor Onofri said the seized cocaine has an approximate street value of \$45,000. The BMW was seized as drug proceeds. He also commended all of the agencies involved in the investigation and arrests, including the Drug Enforcement Administration HIDTA 4 and the Hamilton, Princeton and Trenton police departments, under the command of his Special Investigations Unit.

Bethea, 35, and Watkins, 48, of Willingboro, were each charged with numerous narcotic-related offenses. The prosecutor's office has filed motions to detain both men.

Despite having been charged, every defendant is presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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