



PRESS RELEASE

Attorney General Frosh Announces Indictments of Five Defendants for Attempted Illegal Possession of Firearms and Perjury *Attorney General Charges Five Defendants for Lying on Firearms Applications*

BALTIMORE, MD (July 10, 2018) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh today announced that a Baltimore County grand jury returned indictments for five separate defendants: Angel Roberto Arias, 36, of Frederick; Austin Chandler Carter, Jr., 34, of Baltimore; Benjamin Earl Paswater, 42, of Greensboro; Joseph Ross West, 29, of Mechanicsville; and a fifth individual who is not being identified at this time pending service of an open bench warrant.

Charges in the indictments include attempted illegal possession of a firearm with a conviction for a crime of violence, attempted illegal possession of a firearm with a disqualifying conviction, perjury, and false statement on a firearms application. The investigation was led by the Maryland Office of the Attorney General and the Maryland State Police (MSP) Gun Enforcement Section.

Maryland’s Firearm Safety Act of 2013 requires that anyone wishing to purchase a regulated firearm apply for a Handgun Qualification License (HQL). Under the law, the following persons are prohibited from possessing a regulated firearm: a person who has been previously convicted of any crime of violence, any felony, or certain misdemeanors; a person who is the respondent of an active peace or protective order; or a person who has previously been found by a court incompetent to stand trial, not criminally responsible by reason of a mental condition, or has been committed to a mental institution. The applicants must disclose if any of these circumstances apply to them, and asks them to certify the truth of their answers under penalties of perjury.

“These people did not make an honest mistake on their applications,” said Attorney General Frosh. “These are individuals already convicted of violent crimes or found to be a danger to others. Their attempts to cover up their criminal histories in order to purchase handguns are separate criminal acts for which they must be held accountable, and they certainly should not be allowed to possess firearms.”

Investigators with the Gun Enforcement Section work directly with prosecutors in the Attorney General’s Organized Crime Unit to investigate, charge, and prosecute these cases. The defendants have an arraignment set in the Circuit Court for Baltimore County on July 23, 2018.

In making today's announcement, Attorney General Frosh thanked Organized Crime Chief Katie Dorian, Assistant Attorney General Jared Albert, and Detective Sergeant Frank Lopez of the MSP Gun Enforcement Section. Attorney General Frosh also thanked State's Attorney for Baltimore County Scott Shellenberger for his assistance in this investigation.

A criminal indictment is merely an accusation of wrongdoing, and a defendant is presumed innocent until the State proves the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.