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Press Release

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Larell Watkins Sentenced for his Role in the BFL/CBL RICO Conspiracy

Buffalo, New York, June 18, 2020 – Larell Watkins of Buffalo, New York, was sentenced to 19 years in prison and 5 years supervised release by United States District Judge Lawrence J. Vilardo following his pleas of guilty to two counts of engaging in a racketeering conspiracy and a narcotics conspiracy. The charges relate to Mr. Watkins’ role in criminal activities that took place in and around the Town Gardens Apartments and the east side of Buffalo between 2014 and 2018. At sentencing, Watkins stated that he was sorry for his actions. He personally apologized to the family of Xavier Wimes as well as others within the Towne Gardens community and beyond. Mr. Watkins indicated that he was “ready to change” and that he will use his time in jail “to become a better person, father, and husband.”

Watkins’ attorney, Robert C. Singer, Esq., of Singer Legal PLLC, stated, “This afternoon represents a turning point in Larell’s life. Numerous people expressed the belief that Larell is ready to move forward on a different path. Judge Vilardo remarked how he was pleasantly “surprised” by Larell’s expressions of remorse as well as Larell’s desire to live a different life. Those expressions are what led Judge Vilardo to accept the plea agreement and express optimism that things will be different in the future. I share that optimism.”

Attorney Singer added: “Inner-city kids, like Larell Watkins, witness violence, in general, and gun violence, in particular, more than their suburban and rural contemporaries. They witness death. They hear gunshots. They attend funerals. And every time they hear it and see it, they suffer trauma that they are ill-equipped to deal with. It is very easy to say Larell is just “part of the problem,” but doing so overlooks how he got to this courtroom in the first place. As we learned during this case, Larell did not carry a gun or shoot at people until he was shot at by other kids, blocks from the U.S. Courthouse and Buffalo City Hall. Why do we continue to let this happen in our community when we know what it leads to in the end?”

“Rather than use the law enforcement powers of the federal government *after-the-fact* to indict boys like Larell and have these boys sentenced under a law normally reserved for punishing mobsters, we should use federal resources *proactively* to help boys like Larell before they are so scared of others in their community that they feel the need to arm themselves and shoot back. My hope is that the important national discussion that is going on right now will help us solve the serious, structural problems that exist in our community that contributed to the events in this case. The answers to these problems are not easy, but one thing is certain: Mass incarceration is not a solution to this problem, but an ineffective reaction to our failure to solve these serious problems.”