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**Inglewood Police Officer and an Informant Arrested on
Federal Drug Trafficking Charges**

LOS ANGELES – Federal authorities have arrested an Inglewood Police officer on narcotics trafficking charges that allege two cocaine transactions, one involving a kilogram of the drug, the Justice Department announced today.

A second man who was once approved to work as an informant for the police officer also has been arrested after authorities discovered over a kilogram of heroin and more than a half-kilogram of suspected cocaine at his residence.

Officer John Abel Baca, 45, of Whittier, a 21-year veteran of the Inglewood Police Department and their police union representative, was arrested October 21, two days after a federal grand jury returned a two-count indictment charging him with distribution of cocaine.

The indictment alleges two transactions, the first occurring on April 29, when Baca allegedly delivered cocaine to a witness cooperating with law enforcement. Baca allegedly delivered approximately one kilogram of cocaine to the same cooperating witness during another meeting on May 4, in exchange for \$22,000 in cash.

Baca's case was unsealed today following the arrest of an alleged confederate – Gerardo Ekonomo, 42, of South Los Angeles. Ekonomo was taken into custody Thursday after FBI agents executed a federal search warrant at his residence and seized narcotics buried in his yard, as well as a firearm and ammunition inside his residence.

Ekonomo was named in a criminal complaint filed today that charges him with possession with intent to distribute heroin. Ekonomo is scheduled to make his initial appearance on Monday, November 1, in United States District Court in downtown Los Angeles.

According to the affidavit in support of the criminal complaint, Baca obtained approval for Ekonomo to purportedly work as a confidential source five years ago, but Ekonomo conducted no documented operations after he was signed up as an informant.

The affidavit filed today notes that Ekonomo was arrested by officers with the City of North Las Vegas Police Department (NLVPD) on June 16 after they found 3 kilograms of heroin in his vehicle. On July 13, Baca contacted a NLVPD officer to

inquire “about the status of Ekonomo’s criminal case with the North Las Vegas Police Department, and offering that Ekonomo could ‘work off’ the case by cooperating,” according to the affidavit authored by an FBI special agent.

Baca’s alleged intervention in Ekonomo’s case demonstrates that “Baca is willing to abuse his position as a law enforcement officer in furtherance of his drug trafficking activities and to assist and protect his co-conspirators,” according to the affidavit. The NLVPD officer did not dismiss the charges against Ekonomo and that case remains pending.

During his initial court appearance and arraignment on October 22, Baca was ordered detained without bond after the court found that he was a flight risk and a danger to the community. Baca’s trial is currently set for December 14 in United States District Court in Santa Ana.

If convicted on the charges in the indictment, Baca faces a five-year mandatory minimum prison sentence and a maximum sentence of 60 years of imprisonment. If convicted of the charge in the complaint, Ekonomo faces a 10-year mandatory minimum prison sentence and a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Indictments and criminal complaints contain allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

The FBI is investigating this matter. The Inglewood Police Department provided its full cooperation during the investigation.

Assistant United States Attorneys Veronica Dragalin and Cassie D. Palmer of the Public Corruption and Civil Rights Section, and Gina Kong of the Santa Ana Branch Office are prosecuting this case.