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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 18, 2016

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Mercer County Grand Jury Returns 37-Count Indictment in Lawrence Township Home Invasions

TRENTON – A Mercer County grand jury recently returned a 37-count indictment charging two men in three home invasions in the Avalon Run apartment complex in Lawrence in 2015, Acting Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri reported.

John Gaines, age 23, was named in 35 of the indictment counts. He is charged with multiple counts of carjacking, kidnapping, robbery, weapons offenses, criminal restraint, burglary, theft and terroristic threats. The charges pertain to three separate incidents at the Avalon Run apartment complex in Lawrence Township.

On August 12, 2015, Gaines and co-defendant Righteous Laster entered a first-floor apartment in the Avalon Run complex through an unlocked sliding door. They held the occupant at knifepoint while they scoured his apartment. The men then forced the victim into his own car, took him to two ATM machines and forced him to withdraw money. The victim was then driven to Trenton and released unharmed.

On September 9, 2015, Gaines returned to the apartment complex and knocked on a door in Building #6. When the victim opened the door, he was met by Gaines who entered the apartment armed with a handgun. He forced the victim to drive to a nearby bank and withdraw money from his account. Gaines forced the victim to turn over the money and then drive him to Trenton, where Gaines fled on foot and left the victim unharmed.

On September 14, 2015, Gaines repeated this pattern in Building #2. Armed again with a weapon, he forced the victim and three of his roommates into a rear room of the apartment. Gaines left after about 10 minutes and the victims were unharmed.

Righteous Laster, age 20, also of Trenton, is named in 16 counts of the indictment related to the August 12 crime, including carjacking, kidnapping, robbery, weapons offenses, criminal restraint, burglary, theft and terroristic threats.

Laster was arrested on August 24, 2015. Gaines was arrested on October 10, 2015, by members of the Lawrence Police Department and the U.S. Marshals NY/NJ Regional Fugitive Task Force. Both men remain in jail on bail.

Assistant Prosecutor Scott Gershman presented the case to the grand jury.

The indictment is a result of an investigation by Detective Sergeant Joseph Lech IV and Detective Todd Caruso of the Lawrence Township Police Department. The U.S. Marshals NY/NJ Regional Fugitive Task Force, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, the New Jersey State Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Trenton Police Department assisted in the investigation.

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

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