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### Man Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Murder-for-Hire in Shooting of Correctional Officer

U.S. Attorney's Office  
April 09, 2014

District of South Carolina  
(803) 929-3000

COLUMBIA, SC—United States Attorney Bill Nettles stated today that Sean Echols, age 30, of Orangeburg, South Carolina, pled guilty as charged today in federal court. Echols plead guilty to conspiracy to use interstate facilities in murder-for-hire, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1958(a). United States District Judge Joseph F. Anderson, Jr. accepted the plea and will impose a sentence after he has reviewed the presentence report, which will be prepared by the U.S. Probation Office.

Evidence presented at the change of plea hearing established that during the early morning hours of March 5, 2010, Robert Johnson, a captain with the South Carolina Department of Corrections, was confronted in his home by an armed gunman, who shot him numerous times in the chest, leaving him for dead. Captain Johnson has undergone numerous surgeries as a result of this shooting and is still under a doctor's care. The investigation, which is still ongoing, has revealed that the shooting was done in retaliation as a direct result of Captain Johnson's enforcement of contraband rules in the South Carolina Department of Corrections. Captain Johnson had foiled a number of shipments of contraband (such as drugs and cell phones) into the state prison and some of the inmates were unhappy about that. The investigation revealed that earlier in 2010, a plot was hatched among certain inmates to retaliate against Captain Johnson so that the shipments of contraband (such as drugs and cell phones) into the prison would not be disrupted. Interviews determined that one specific inmate was a person of interest in the plot. A shakedown of the prison revealed a cell phone belonging to and used by that specific inmate. Cell records connected that inmate to another recently released inmate, Sean Echols. Through interviews, agents learned that Echols had communicated through cell phones with the inmate and discussed the plot to kill Captain Johnson, specifying how to carry out the shooting and what Echols would receive in exchange for his role in the plot. After the discussions, that inmate then mailed an initial payment to Echols for his role in the murder-for-hire conspiracy. Thus, Echols and his co-conspirators used both cell phones and the mail in this murder-for-hire plot, both of which are facilities of interstate commerce.

Echols is currently serving a state sentence stemming from an unrelated incident in Orangeburg.

Mr. Nettles stated that Echols faces a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years, a fine of \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to five years following the term of imprisonment.

The case was investigated by the Sumter Police Department, the South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division (SLED), and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Assistant United States Attorneys William K. Witherspoon and Stacey D. Haynes of the Columbia office handled the case.

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