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**PRESS RELEASE**

**February 6, 2024**

TO: Media  
FROM: Jody Pickens, District Attorney General, 26<sup>th</sup> Judicial District  
RE: Local "Rapper" Paul Michael Cheairs, a/k/a "Big Phil," Sentenced to Prison

On October 15, 2020, Officer Joseph Shephard (now Deputy U.S. Marshal Shephard) of the Jackson Police Department conducted a traffic stop on a 2016 Chrysler 200 after he observed that the vehicle appeared to have window tint that was darker than the legal limit. Officer Shephard found defendant Paul Michael Cheairs, then age twenty-seven (27) of Jackson, Tennessee, to be the driver. Officer Shephard noted the odor of marijuana—in fact, the defendant was actively smoking marijuana during the traffic stop—and conducted a probable cause search that resulted in the seizure of nearly a pound of marijuana, drug paraphernalia commonly associated with the sale of marijuana, and a loaded FN 9mm handgun. At the time Cheairs committed these offenses, he had already been convicted of three (3) counts of Aggravated Robbery in 2013 and had been sentenced to serve eight (8) years in the Tennessee Department of Correction.

On October 31, 2022, a Madison County Grand Jury indicted the defendant for Possession of Marijuana with Intent to Sell or Deliver, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia, Possession of a Firearm during Commission of a Dangerous Felony, Unlawful Possession of a Firearm, and Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted (Violent) Felon.

The State of Tennessee, represented by Assistant District Attorneys General Michelle R. Pugh and Bradley F. Champine, tried the defendant before a jury on August 21, 2023. In addition to Officer Shephard's testimony and body-worn camera video capturing the traffic stop, the jury also heard evidence in the form of a rap video produced by the defendant, using the name Big Phil, entitled "First Day Out." In the video, the defendant colorfully recounted his arrest, including details such as the weight of the drugs with which he was caught ("about a pound") and the firearm he was carrying ("got caught with my FN") at the time. The jury convicted the defendant of being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm and possession of marijuana with the intent to sell/deliver. On February 5, 2024, Judge Joseph Howell of Madison County Circuit Court Division I found the defendant to be a Range II multiple offender due to his three prior convictions for Aggravated Robbery and sentenced him to serve seventeen (17) years in the Tennessee Department of Correction. During the sentencing hearing, the State asked the trial court to consider evidence proffered at trial that the defendant was affiliated with the 107 Hoover Crips, a gang with a history of significant criminal activity in Jackson.

District Attorney General Jody Pickens said, “Paul Michael Cheairs, a/k/a ‘Big Phil,’ received a big sentence for his continued criminal conduct, which included arming himself after having been convicted of three violent felonies, trafficking in drugs, and generally leading a criminal, anti-social lifestyle. This defendant’s action displayed a complete lack of respect for the law that we see in so many offenders today. Once he was pulled over, he asked the arresting officer if he could finish smoking the marijuana blunt he had in his hand and then after posting bond, he immediately published a rap video for all the public to see in which he bragged about his criminal exploits. As I have said before, felons and firearms are not a good mix. I am very proud of the work performed in this case by the Jackson Police Department and Assistant District Attorneys General Michelle Pugh and Brad Champine.”