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**D.A. BROWN: FORMER MENSA MEMBER SENTENCED
TO ONE TO THREE YEARS IN PRISON FOR WELFARE FRAUD**

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a former member of Mensa, the high IQ society, has been sentenced to one to three years in prison for welfare fraud while engaging in a reign of terror against his ex-girlfriend.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant, who used deceit and fraud to feign a need for rent support, has now been held accountable for ripping off the system for thousands of dollars. The state prison sentence imposed today by the court is just punishment for the defendant's criminal conduct."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Steven Finkelstein, 58, of 345 East 205th Street in the Bronx. He was found guilty on February 3, 2006 of third-degree welfare fraud and third-degree grand larceny following a non-jury trial before Queens Supreme Court Justice Joel L. Blumenfeld who imposed today's indeterminate sentence of one to three years in prison. The sentence is to run consecutive to the prison sentence that he is presently serving for a parole violation.

District Attorney Brown said that the defendant was charged in August 2003 with forcing his then-girlfriend, Estelle Margolin, to allow him to use her Rego Park co-op apartment address to receive \$4,314 in welfare housing benefits from the City's Human Resources Administration without actually living there. Evidence presented at trial showed that the defendant threatened to harm Ms. Margolin, her family, her cats and her neighbors unless she signed a fraudulent lease so that he could receive a shelter allowance.

According to the trial evidence, Ms Margolin met the defendant in 1998 through the Mensa organization, a group which limits its membership to those in the top 2 percent of IQs, and they lived together at her Rego Park residence. However, he ultimately began threatening her and threatening to destroy her property. To free herself from the defendant, Ms. Margolin agreed to rent an apartment for the defendant and to pay the rent with the understanding he would no longer threaten or harass her. Ms. Margolin ultimately signed a lease for a condominium located at 51-34 30th Avenue in Woodside, but by late 1999, she advised the defendant that she was no longer going to pay his rent. When the defendant declined to pay the rent himself, the building landlord and Ms. Margolin brought an eviction proceeding against the defendant.

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Testimony at trial also showed that in early 2000, the defendant was still residing at the Woodside apartment and the eviction proceedings continued. During this time, the defendant was introduced to Barbara Segretto at a Mensa-related event and they began a romantic relationship. The defendant pushed, prodded, and coerced Ms Segretto into allowing him to move in with her. The defendant's campaign of "phone phreaking" – such as sending victims lengthy unrequested faxes, generating persistent and annoying electronic tones and manufacturing and creating bogus collect calls in both English and Spanish – against her friends, family, and business contacts was so intense that Ms. Segretto was forced to cave into his demands. The defendant was ultimately convicted in Bronx County of Grand Larceny by extortion for his actions against Ms. Segretto.

Former Senior Assistant District Attorney Christine Burke of the District Attorney's Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau, conducted the investigation. Assisting in the investigation were Supervising Investigator Mona Ayala Lake and former Investigator Louis Fortunat, of the New York City Human Resources Administration.

Senior Assistant District Attorney Neil F. Gitin, of the District Attorney's Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau, prosecuted the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gregory Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at www.queensda.org.