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**43 CHARGED IN MAJOR DRUG SWEEP FOLLOWING UNDERCOVER
INVESTIGATION AT TWO FAR ROCKAWAY HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS**

*140 Undercover Drug Buys Made; Numerous Ziplock Bags of Crack Cocaine,
.357 Magnum and Narcotic Proceeds Seized; Majority of Defendants Face Up to 15 Years In Prison*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown and Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly today announced the indictment of 24 alleged drug peddlers and the arrest of 19 others for hawking drugs near the New York City Housing Authority's Redfern Houses and the privately owned Dix McBride Apartments, both in Far Rockaway. Fourteen of the indicted individuals are in custody and ten are presently being sought as fugitives.

The defendants – who range in age from 16 to 47 and include two alleged Bloods gang members – were arrested early yesterday and are charged with selling crack and powdered cocaine and marihuana to undercover police officers on more than 140 separate occasions over a seven-month period. Most of the alleged buys were for single crack hits, which typically range from 1.5 to 2.3 grains of cocaine.

District Attorney Brown said, "This initiative is part of our continuing campaign to stop the plague of drug-based violence in Far Rockaway. The lives of the residents of the Redfern and Dix McBride Houses, as well as all of the residents of Far Rockaway, has always been among my chief concerns as District Attorney. These arrests should put a significant dent in the drug trafficking which has long troubled the residents of Far Rockaway. We will continue to work together with our police officers and our elected officials and community leaders to keep the citizens of this neighborhood safe."

Commissioner Kelly said, "These individuals held sway over two housing developments. These are places where New Yorkers of little means live. They, like everyone, hope to raise their families in a safe environment. I want to commend the Police Officers and prosecutors who have made life for these families a little safer as a result of their efforts."

District Attorney Brown continued, "This was not a well-organized ring but rather an infestation of individual drug peddlers, some of whom worked together, who took over the Redfern and Dix McBride Houses as their own to operate their illegal business. Many of them are alleged to have delivered narcotics to their customers after the customers placed their drug orders by telephone. They mistakenly thought that they were operating under wraps when they allegedly sold their illicit drugs to undercover officers. In fact, they were under investigation and marked for arrest, prosecution and long prison sentences."

The investigation commenced last summer when detectives assigned to the NYPD's Queens Narcotics Division received information that drug dealers were engaged in operations around the Redfern Houses and the Dix McBride Apartments. In response, the NYPD's Queens Narcotics Division and District Attorney Brown's Narcotics Investigation Bureau dispatched numerous undercover officers to purchase crack and powdered cocaine and marijuana. During the course of the investigation, undercover officers purchased narcotics on 140 separate occasions.

In addition to the arrests made yesterday, officers executed three court-authorized search warrants and recovered a total of more than 50 ziplock bags of crack cocaine, a loaded .357 magnum, quantities of marihuana, narcotics paraphernalia and narcotics proceeds.

The Redfern Houses, located at 1456 Beach Channel Drive in Far Rockaway, is part of the New York City Housing Authority's network of housing developments. The 18-acre Redfern Houses were completed in 1959 and consist of nine six- and seven-story buildings that house some 1,780 people in 604 apartments.

The Dix McBride Apartments, located at 2229-2259 Dix Avenue in Far Rockaway, is a privately owned apartment complex built in 1998 consisting of five four-story buildings.

The indicted defendants are variously charged in fifteen separate indictments with numerous counts of Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the Third Degree, a Class B felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison and Criminal Sale of Marijuana in the Fourth Degree, a Class A misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in jail.

The investigation was conducted by detectives of the New York City Police Department's Queens Narcotics Division under the command of Inspector Robert Napolitano, including Detectives Peter Maguire, Michael Monahan, Michael DiMeglio, Charles Scheferston, John Capissi, Robert Bell and Les Johnson and Police Officer Joseph Dunne, under the supervision of Sergeant Keith DeGiorgio, Lieutenant Brian Kelly and Captain Steven Zolga, under the overall supervision of Assistant Deputy Chief Edmund Hartnett, Executive Officer, Narcotics Division, and Chief Anthony Izzo, Commanding Officer, Organized Crime Control Bureau.

The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Mary M. Lowenburg and Brian Allen of the District Attorney's Narcotics Investigation Bureau, with assistance from Assistant District Attorney George J. Farrugia, Supervisor in the District Attorney's Gang Violence and Hate Crime Bureau, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Wilbert J. LeMelle, Chief, Karen J. Friedman, Deputy Chief, and Mark L. Katz, Supervisor, and the overall supervision of Executive District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that indictments are merely an accusation and that defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: E-version of this press release posted at www.queensda.org

Indicted defendants under arrest are:

Theo Allen, 19, of 13-95 Sunnyside Street in Far Rockaway
Darrell Francis, 17, of 12-70 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway
Durell Gaines, 18, of 12-70 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway
Gail Gantt, 42, of 13-02 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway
Donnell Gravette (a/k/a Conrad Bishop), 23, of 14-30 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway
Keith Jones, 21, of 12-70 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway
Gordon McCall, 18, of 22-59 Dix Avenue in Far Rockaway
Shavar McFadden 20, of 12-70 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway
Shamiek Patterson, 20, of 20-30 Elk Drive in Far Rockaway
Rudolph Somra, 16, of 14-15 Chandler Street in Far Rockaway
Edward Vandross, 19, of 13-20 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway,
Jerome Weir, 22, of 14-15 Chandler Street in Far Rockaway
John Whitmore, 17, of 22-51 Dix Avenue in Far Rockaway
Darnell Williams, 27

Other arrested defendants are:

Kareem Buddington, 20, of 14-15 Chandler Street in far Rockaway
Richard Carlos
Chandrika Clarke
Donald Francis
Faith Gardner, 22, of 21-08 Nameoke Street
Davone Gittins
Romeo Gittins
Charles Haines
Kwemawe Johnson, 16, of 13-18 McBride Street in Far Rockaway
Joyce Memminger, 47, of 12-70 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway

Tawanna Piper

Terri Ann Sancho

Baron Smith, 36, of 12-50 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway

Samuel Tonga,

James Tuffin, 48, of 14-15 Chandler Street in Far Rockaway

Michael Vanderhorst, 19, of 12-70 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway

James Washington, 22 of 22-51 Dix Avenue in far Rockaway

Keith Wilkins,

Tyrone Winslow, 19, of 12-70 Redfern Avenue in Far Rockaway.