



RICHARD A. BROWN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY
QUEENS COUNTY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568
718-286-6000**

Release # 229-2006
www.queensda.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2006

CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE
(718) 286-6315

**D.A. BROWN: TRIO OF ALLEGED SCAM ARTISTS ARE CHARGED
WITH DEFRAUDING QUEENS BUSINESS OWNERS IN PHONY PAYMENT SCHEME**

Allegedly Posed As Utility and Bank Employees To Bilk Victims of More Than \$57,000

Queens County District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that two Bronx women and a Manhattan man have been charged with defrauding four small business owners and one resident in Queens of tens of thousands of dollars by impersonating Con Edison and Bank of America employees and offering to pay their bills or process their payments – often at a discounted price – if they paid in cash.

District Attorney Brown said, “The defendants are accused of being scam artists who would dangle a financial carrot in front of their unsuspecting victims’ before cleaning out their wallets. Such individuals rely on the gullibility, innocence or greed of their victims to run their scams. Consumers should always remember the old adage: if it sounds too good to be true – it probably is.”

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Maria Dorta, 54, of 3705 Park Avenue in the Bronx; Juana Garcia- Lopez, 45, of 2115 Washington Avenue in the Bronx; and Aleido Gilrubio, 53, of 2383 Second Avenue in Manhattan, all unemployed. The defendants have been charged with two counts of third-degree grand larceny, one count of fourth-degree grand larceny, one count of first-degree scheme to defraud and two counts of petit larceny. If convicted they each face up to seven years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that the investigation began in July 2006 when the New York City Police Department’s 110th Precinct, having received numerous complaints that individuals were posing as utility and bank employees and defrauding people out of large sums of money, referred the matter to the District Attorney’s Economic Crimes Bureau. During the investigation, it was discovered that similar complaints were being reported in other boroughs.

According to District Attorney Brown, it is alleged in a criminal complaint that one or more of the defendants would approach business owners in the Corona area of Queens and identify themselves as employees of either Con Edison or Bank of America – complete with uniforms and employee identification cards. The defendants would then allegedly offer to process their payments, consolidate their bills or pay them off – often at a discounted price – if they agreed to do business with them and pay cash. As a result, in five separate incidents that occurred between July 25, 2006, and September 25, 2006, the defendants allegedly defrauded Queens business owners and resident of more than \$57,000.

For example, it is alleged that, on July 25, 2006, the defendants Dorta and Garcia-Lopez – posing as a Con Ed employee and a debt consolidator for Bank of America, respectively – approached a Corona business owner at her beauty salon and spa at 90-54 Corona Avenue and said they could process her utility and loan payments for her. As a result, the victim allegedly gave the two defendants \$1,717.94 in cash to pay her Con Ed bill and \$30,000 in cash to pay off her credit card loans. However, after reviewing her accounts, the victim discovered that both bills remained unpaid.

District Attorney Brown said the complaint additionally alleges that, as part of their scheme, once Dorta and Garcia-Lopez found out about an outstanding Con Ed bill, they would call Gilrubio and tell him to go pay the bill. Gilrubio would allegedly find checks in the garbage and use them to pay the bills even though he knew there were not sufficient funds to cover the bills. Dorta and Garcia-Lopez would then allegedly return to the business owners – before the checks actually cleared – and hand them receipts that the bills had been paid. It is alleged that Dorta and Garcia-Lopez paid Gilrubio \$300 per each transaction.

The three defendants were arrested on Wednesday, October 25, 2006, by detectives assigned to the NYPD’s 110th Precinct Detective Squad after Dorta and Garcia-Lopez were observed entering a vehicle operated by Gilrubio. Detectives also recovered a Con Edison utility helmet and blue utility uniform from the vehicle.

The defendants were arraigned last night in front of Queens Criminal Court Judge Joseph A. Zayas who ordered bail for defendants Dorta and Garcia-Lopez in the amount of \$50,000 each and released defendant Gilrubio on his own recognizance and set a return date for November 9, 2006 for the three defendants.

District Attorney Brown said the investigation is ongoing and if anyone believes they may have been victimized by these defendants to please contact his Economic Crimes Bureau at 718-286-6673.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Daniel Castillo, Michael Hiddessen, Raymond Phillips and Police Officer Orlando Sanchez of the NYPD's 110th Precinct's Detective Squad, under the supervision of Lieutenant Edward Rutter, and Sergeants Robert Garrity and Brian Basil and Detectives Richard Pimental, Kevin Vega and Police Officer Michael Fischer of the 115th Precinct's Detective Squad under the supervision of Lieutenant Anthony Mottola and under the overall supervision of Captain Patrick Wynne, Queens Detective Borough Zone Commander, with the assistance of the NYPD's Organized Theft Task Force and Con Edison's Security Department.

Assistant District Attorney Joseph G. D'Arrigo, of the District Attorney's Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and with the assistance in the investigation of ADA Kevin Higgins of the DA's Organized Crime and Rackets Bureau under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gerard A. Brave, Chief, and Marc P. Resnick, Deputy 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.

It should be noted that a criminal complaint is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

#

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