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**D.A. BROWN: ASTORIA BUSINESSMAN CONVICTED OF POSING AS LAWYER
AND STEALING \$6.0 MILLION FROM CLIENTS**

Defendant Represented Self At Trial; Faces Up to 130 Years In Prison

_____ Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that an Astoria businessman has been convicted of holding himself out as an attorney and a registered investment advisor and stealing \$6.0 million from eight individuals through real estate and capital investment transactions.

District Attorney Brown said, "Although charged with impersonating an attorney and practicing law without a license, the defendant chose to represent himself at trial. The old adage, 'One who represents himself has a fool for a client' was once again proven true. The defendant was found guilty as charged of defrauding eight individuals of amounts ranging from \$63,000 to \$3.2 million."

District Attorney Brown continued, "Evidence presented at trial showed that the defendant engaged in very risky day trading of stocks and ran up negative balances of as much as \$6.0 million in his accounts. Needing to find a way to cover his losses, the defendant took over the law practice of an attorney who had become suddenly ill and misrepresented himself as an attorney."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Mohammed Rafikian (also known as Mo Kian), 41, of 585 Hickory Street in Westbury, Long Island. Rafikian is chairman and chief executive officer of First Investors Capital Corporation, located at 34-13 Broadway in Astoria, Queens. He also periodically worked as a paralegal for the law firm of Marcus & Associates, which maintained an office as a subtenant at Rafikian's Astoria office. It was the named partner of this law firm whose identity that Rafikian assumed.

District Attorney Brown said that the defendant was convicted yesterday of one count of first-degree grand larceny, seven counts of second-degree grand larceny, three counts of first-degree scheme to defraud, eight counts of second-degree criminal impersonation and four counts of practicing or appearing as an attorney-at-law without being admitted. Queens Supreme Court Justice Daniel Lewis, who presided at the six-week trial, ordered the defendant held without bail and set sentencing for September 21, 2007, at which time the defendant faces up to 130 years in prison.

The District Attorney said that, according to trial testimony, the defendant held himself out as an attorney and practiced law at 34-13 Broadway in Astoria between March 2000 and December 2005, during which time he unlawfully stole \$6.0 million from eight individuals. The victims included a former cardiologist, a dentist, a bar manager, a retired disabled elevator mechanic, a retired disabled school teacher, a NYCHA inspector, a painting contractor and a family friend.

In one instance, for example, Rafikian took \$3.2 million from an individual and promised to invest the funds at a promised rate of return of 26 percent. The defendant provided no statements to the individual nor did he return the money upon demand. The defendant, however, did send the client two checks, totaling \$150,000, which were returned for insufficient funds.

In a second instance, the defendant took more than \$900,000 from another individual for the purchase of a building in Astoria. However, the defendant neither purchased the building nor did he return the funds when requested. In addition, the defendant sold a laundromat on behalf of the individual for \$75,000 but only remitted \$12,000 to him.

In yet a third instance, testified to at trial, an individual gave the defendant approximately \$816,000 for the purchase of a house and a bar. However, the purchases never took place and the defendant failed to return the money when demanded by the client.

The investigation was conducted by now retired NYPD Detective Daniel Lewis, formerly of the 114th Precinct Detective Squad, and now retired Detective Lynn O'Garrow, formerly of the Special Frauds Squad, under the supervision of Lieutenant Kenneth Ling, Squad Commander, and the overall supervision of Chief of Detectives George F. Brown.

The case was prosecuted by Senior Assistant District Attorney Neil F. Gitin, of the District Attorney's Economic Crimes Bureau, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, 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.

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