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**D.A. BROWN: TWO QUEENS ATTORNEYS CHARGED WITH RAIDING THEIR
ESCROW ACCOUNTS AND STEALING NEARLY \$200,000 FROM CLIENTS**

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that two attorneys have been charged separately with looting their respective escrow accounts and failing to return money they had been holding for clients.

District Attorney Brown said, "According to the charges, the defendants not only violated the trust that their clients placed in them but they let down the entire legal system which counts on members of the bar to conduct themselves in an ethical matter. Each of the attorneys has been disbarred, and each now faces serious criminal charges."

District Attorney Brown identified the defendants as Arelia Taveras, 46, presently of Bloomington, Minnesota, and Mark Jacobs, 58, of Glen Head, New York. Taveras, who is accused of stealing a total of \$99,142 from four clients, is charged with three counts of third-degree grand larceny, second-degree forgery, first-degree offering a false instrument for filing and scheme to defraud. Jacobs is charged with second-degree grand larceny for allegedly stealing \$91,564 from a client. If convicted, Taveras faces up to seven years in prison and Jacobs faces up to 15 years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to a criminal complaint, Taveras accepted \$2,500 from a buyer as a contract deposit and an additional \$22,500 as a down payment on a cooperative apartment in Bayside that the defendant was selling. It is alleged further that the buyer's application was subsequently denied by the cooperative board, but when she tried to get her deposit back Taveras allegedly refused. After numerous requests, according to the criminal complaint, the buyer received a call from Taveras' lawyer stating that she would not repay the money and that she was in a rehabilitation center in Colorado.

In addition, according to the criminal complaint, Taveras is accused of ripping off three clients including one who retained her in connection with a real estate transaction. The complaint charges that Taveras failed to release \$10,000 of the client's money that was held in escrow. Another client was allegedly bilked of \$30,000 after retaining the defendant to represent her in the sale of commercial real estate. And finally, Taveras is accused of stealing \$34,142 from a third client who allegedly retained her to represent him in connection with a divorce proceeding.

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It is further alleged that according to a videotaped statement submitted to the grievance committee of the New York State Appellate Division, Second Department, in response to one of the allegations of theft, Taveras said she took client money because of a gambling addiction and that she was remorseful. Later, she allegedly told detectives that she was a personal friend of the president of the Dominican Republic and that she could disappear in the Dominican Republic and never be found if she chose to do so. Taveras also allegedly told detectives that she could not believe she was being arrested, that the alleged thefts were not a big deal and that she would pay back all of the money. Taveras was disbarred in June 2007.

District Attorney Brown said that in a separate criminal complaint, Mark Jacobs is charged with stealing \$91,564 from a client, who retained him in 2003 in connection with a divorce action. In the context of that proceeding, the client's marital home was sold on May 23, 2006, and the defendant received the monies to be held in escrow. Jacobs was disbarred several months later, but allegedly failed to turn over the money to the client's new attorney despite repeated demands.

Taveras was arraigned on November 23, 2007, before Queens Criminal Court Judge Alex Zigman who set bail at \$20,000 and ordered the defendant to return to court on December 11, 2007. Jacobs is expected to be arraigned today in Queens Criminal Court in Kew Gardens.

The cases were investigated by members of the Queens District Attorney's Detective Bureau, including Detective Joseph Brancaccio and Detective Lester Frank and Sergeant Evelyn Alegre under the supervision of Chief Investigator Lawrence J. Festa and Deputy Chief Investigator Albert D. Velardi.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Carmencita N. Gutierrez, Deputy Bureau Chief of the District Attorney's the Integrity Bureau, under the supervision of James M. Liander, Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Peter A. Crusco, Executive Assistant District Attorney, Investigations Division, and Linda M. Cantoni, Deputy Bureau Chief.

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

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Note to Editor: An e-version of this press release is posted on QDA website at www.queensda.org.