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TWO CHARGED IN “GET OUT OF JAIL” SHAKEDOWN SCHEME
Defendants Arrested Outside Queens Courthouse Following Alleged Payoff

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that two men residing in the Sunset Park section of Brooklyn have been charged with attempting to shakedown the mother of a Rikers Island inmate for \$20,000 by claiming that they could get her son released from custody by getting his criminal case dismissed.

District Attorney Brown said, “The inmate’s mother had allegedly befriended one of the defendants who she treated like her own son. In turn, the defendant and an accomplice are now accused of repaying her kindness by playing on the emotional bonds between a mother and her son to rip her off for twenty thousand dollars. Unfortunately for them, the victim confided in her son’s attorney who notified the Queens District Attorney’s Office, which set up a sting operation that brought the defendants right to the courthouse door.”

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Michael Mendez, 19, of 937 40th Street, and Ramon Pabon, 41, of 850 40th Street, both of Brooklyn. The two defendants were arraigned last night before Queens Criminal Court Judge Stephanie L. Zaro on charges of third-degree grand larceny and second-degree criminal impersonation. They each face up to seven years in prison if convicted. Judge Zaro set bail at \$75,000 for Mendez and \$10,000 for Pabon and ordered both defendants to return to court on August 19, 2009.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, Mendez had been released on July 29, 2009, from Rikers Island where he was befriended by another inmate who is currently in jail in lieu of \$40,000 bail on a Queens robbery case. During Mendez’s incarceration, it is alleged, the other inmate’s mother would often send him money because he had no other family. Shortly after his release, Mendez allegedly contacted the mother seeking money and assistance.

On July 30, 2009, it is alleged, Mendez visited the inmate’s mother at her place of business, where she gave him \$200 in cash for a room, \$100 for food, and told him to come back the following day to pick up some of her son’s clothes that would fit him. The following morning, the inmate’s mother allegedly gave Mendez the clothes as promised and an additional \$300 in cash. During their meeting, Mendez allegedly told the mother that he could help her get her son out of jail because he (Mendez) had a friend who worked in the courts and had the ability to get her son’s case dismissed.

It is alleged further that on August 1, 2009, that the inmate’s mother received a call from the defendant Pabon, posing as John Ortiz, who stated that he was a friend of Mendez and that he was contacting her regarding her son. During the course of the day, the mother allegedly had several

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telephone conversations with both defendants during which they discussed the arrangements for her son's case to be dismissed and for his release. During one conversation, Mendez allegedly told her that the fee would be \$12,000 in cash and that her son would be released on his next court appearance, August 12, 2009. Pabon allegedly told her that he worked in the Queens Courthouse and sat directly in the courtroom with another clerk, next to the judge and the district attorney. It is further alleged that during one of their conversations, Mendez told the inmate's mother that Pabon (as Ortiz) had already pulled her son's court file and was beginning to work on his release.

On August 2, 2009, the inmate's mother allegedly met with Mendez at her place of business, during which Mendez told her that the fee would now be \$20,000 in cash because her son's release date had been advanced to the week of August 6, 2009. The following day, Mendez allegedly met the inmate's mother in front of Queens Criminal Court, located at 125-01 Queens Boulevard in Kew Gardens, and handed her a printout of what appeared to be court-generated information concerning her son's incarceration with a projected release date of 8-6-09 printed on the form. Mendez allegedly advised her to come back to the courthouse the following day with \$10,000 in cash because time was of the essence.

On August 4, 2009, it is further alleged, the inmate's mother met Mendez at the courthouse and Mendez placed a call to Pabon, who then walked out of the courthouse as if he were an employee who worked inside. The inmate's mother allegedly informed the two defendants that she did not have the cash that day and instead wrote a check for \$10,000 payable to John Ortiz. After a brief discussion with Pabon, Mendez allegedly told her that a check wasn't a good idea because it could be used as evidence and could be traced to her by the court or district attorney. Finally, it is alleged, at approximately 10:15 a.m. on August 5, 2009, the inmate's mother again met with the defendants in front of the Queens Courthouse where, after a brief conversation, she gave Pabon \$5,000 in cash in exchange for the men agreeing to have her son's criminal case reduced to a misdemeanor and then dismissed. The two defendants were subsequently arrested.

At the time of his arrest, Pabon allegedly made statements to detectives that he had never been an employee of the Queens court staff and that he posed as such at the urging of Mendez for the purpose of defrauding the victim.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Douglas Lee, of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau, under the supervision of Sergeant Evelyn Alegre and Lieutenant Robert J. Burke, and the overall supervision of Chief Lawrence J. Festa and Deputy Chief Albert D. Velardi.

Assistant District Attorney Yvonne Francis, of the District Attorney's Integrity Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys James M. Liander, Bureau Chief, and Carmencita N. Gutierrez, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney 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.

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