



RICHARD A. BROWN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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

Release # 24-2009
www.queensda.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2009

CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE
(718) 286-6315

**QUEENS DISTRICT ATTORNEY RICHARD A. BROWN GIVES PUBLIC SAFETY
BRIEFING TO ELECTED OFFICIALS AT ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST**

*Reports That Crime in Queens County Continues Its Historic Decline
But Expresses Concern About Impact Of Budget Cuts*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today briefed City, State and Federal elected officials from Queens – including Borough President Helen M. Marshall and Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith – at the District Attorney’s annual legislative breakfast held at his Kew Gardens offices. The public safety briefing highlighted key accomplishments and major initiatives of the past year, as well as the difficult challenges facing the office in the year ahead.

The District Attorney began by announcing that crime in Queens County continued its historic decline in 2008 while, in terms of prosecutions, Queens continues to lead the City in many significant categories. The downward turn included a 3.7% decline in serious crime, led by a 10.9% drop in burglary. Overall, crime has been reduced by 34% since 2001 and a remarkable 76% since 1993.

District Attorney Brown said, “Clearly, these figures – showing that the levels have remained near or below their historic lows – offer clear and compelling evidence that our law enforcement initiatives continue to have a profound impact in making Queens County one of the safest counties not just in the city but in the nation.”

The District Attorney attributed the dramatic reduction in serious crime to several factors, among which are:

- Criminal prosecutions – which include non-violent and quality of life offenses – in Queens County have now exceeded the 70,000 mark for the third year in a row;
- Queens handles only 21% of the City’s violent felony prosecutions but is responsible for 30% of New York City’s violent felony convictions – and of all the City’s convicted violent felons who go to state prison, 30% came from Queens County; and
- Queens County’s felony conviction rate remains the best citywide – 91.2% – and its dismissal rate of felony complaints and indictments was the lowest.

District Attorney Brown went on to tell the elected officials and their staffs that reducing gun violence in the county continues to be among his major priorities. “In 2008, we took full advantage of

(more)

recent State legislation that increased the penalty for possession of a loaded firearm – particularly with respect to repeat offenders,” he said. “Our success in this area is reflected in the fact that Queens County has the City’s highest conviction rate and the second highest incarceration rate for gun possession.”

The District Attorney noted that for those possessing firearms, it will come as welcome news that a Queens Gun Buyback program is scheduled to begin next month – Saturday, February 21st – in which people can turn in illegal or unwanted weapons for cash without fear of prosecution. Working with Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly and the New York City Police Department, elected officials, local clergy and others, the gun amnesty program will target the Rockaways and parts of Southeast Queens. The details of the program are expected to be announced early next week.

District Attorney Brown additionally noted that, “Queens County once again last year had the best arrest to arraignment time in the City – 20.41 hours – and the highest percentage of cases arraigned within 24 hours – 83%. Our arrest to sworn complaint time was 8.27 hours – well below the Citywide average of 10.49. Such enhanced performance means that those accused of crime in Queens spend as little time as possible in detention before they see a judge – and that we get our police officers back out on the street more quickly to do their jobs rather than having them hanging out in courthouse corridors.”

As its chief law enforcement officer, District Attorney Brown leads the fight against crime in Queens County by prosecuting criminals and protecting the rights of crime victims. In addition to investigating and prosecuting criminal activity, District Attorney Brown has established cutting-edge intervention and prevention programs to reduce crime throughout Queens County. These initiatives reflect his belief that community mobilization and involvement are critical to reducing crime and revitalizing the community.

Among the programs and initiatives implemented over the years have been a felony gun court; a specialized gun trafficking investigative initiative; Operation Spotlight targeting misdemeanor recidivists; an Elder Abuse Project which provides social service assistance to elderly crime victims and an Elder Fraud Unit which prosecutes crimes involving financial exploitation of the elderly; felony and misdemeanor drug courts; the Crimes Against Revenue program; Operation Guardian which targets child exploitation; a fugitive enforcement program which targets bail jumpers; a school anti-violence program and other youth violence prevention initiatives; and specialized DNA-based prosecutions for sex crimes, burglaries and other crimes.

District Attorney Brown said, “I am optimistic that by continuing the very successful strategies that we have employed in recent years we, together with our law enforcement colleagues, can make Queens County even safer in 2009.”

District Attorney Brown added, “One of our newest initiatives is the Family Justice Center which opened in July 2008 and which offers a host of services and support to victims of domestic violence and their families,” said District Attorney Brown. “In the first three months following its opening, over 2,500 clients visited the center. The families who have accessed the center receive case management, counseling, civil legal assistance and other services. Thirty-eight percent of the client visits were directed to our Office’s Domestic Violence Bureau for assistance in pursuing a criminal prosecution.”

The District Attorney noted that his Domestic Violence Bureau has the highest conviction rate and the lowest dismissal rate of domestic violence cases in the City, and takes more pre-indictment felony pleas than the rest of the city combined.

(more)

As part of his briefing, District Attorney Brown informed the officials of two interesting pilot programs launched last year involving the use of electronic monitoring. Under one of the programs – Operation Exclusion Zone – specially screened defendants convicted of domestic violence are required to wear electronic ankle bracelets as a condition to the disposition of their cases. If an abuser crosses into a prohibited zone, an alert is transmitted to the monitoring company which alerts the victim via a cellphone text message and calls 911 to send police to arrest the offender. A second program recently implemented utilizes a different kind of monitor that checks whether an individual – who has committed DWI or other alcohol-related offenses, including domestic violence offenses fueled by alcohol consumption – has an elevated alcohol level.

District Attorney Brown noted that the major challenge that his office and that of other City prosecutors face today is the combination of repeated – and substantial – City, State and Federal budget cuts that the offices have suffered in recent years – and continue to suffer as a result of the national fiscal crisis.

“As a result of budget cuts since 9/11, we have been forced to substantially reduce costs just to maintain our core functions – things such as case intake, hearings, trials, appellate litigation and our highly specialized investigative initiatives,” said District Attorney Brown. “And yet the reality is that arrests remain high. Since 1993, arrests are up more than 70%. And new trends such as the increase in homicides and proliferation of gang activity and the increase of real estate and mortgage fraud cases require additional attention and resources.”

The District Attorney told the assembled officials that, not surprisingly in light of the national fiscal crisis, mortgage and real estate fraud has begun to be a significant problem in Queens. The District Attorney’s Economic Crimes Bureau has been inundated with a growing number of such cases – many of which target the elderly. At the same time, other types of fraud and financial crimes have mushroomed in both number and scope – including identity theft, financial exploitation of the elderly, telemarketing scams, credit card fraud, counterfeit check fraud, trademark counterfeiting and money laundering. In 2008 alone, the District Attorney’s Consumer Affairs Unit received nearly 1, 200 telephone calls and walk-in visitors from individuals and businesses who were victims of a variety of scams.

District Attorney Brown noted, “Despite budget cuts, our prosecutors are continuing to make major cases against drug traffickers, organized crime mobsters and criminals involved in auto theft, auto insurance fraud, crime at our airports, gun trafficking, credit card fraud, identity theft, money laundering and all sorts of other types of criminal activity.”

The District Attorney concluded his remarks to the officials with a request for help, declaring, “Programs such as these, as well as other innovative initiatives and the use of new technology, have revolutionized the prosecution of criminal cases – and have helped in quickly exonerating individuals who have been mistakenly arrested. But the bottom line is that we need you – more than ever before – to help us to get the resources necessary to continue to reduce the level of violence within the County and improve the quality of the lives of our residents.”

#

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