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QUEENS ATTORNEY PLEADS GUILTY TO RAIDING ESCROW ACCOUNTS
AND STEALING \$130,000 FROM CLIENTS
Claims Took Money To Finance Gambling Habit

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that an attorney charged with looting her escrow accounts in order to feed her gambling habit has pleaded guilty to grand larceny and is expected to be sentenced to up to nine years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said, “The defendant violated the trust of her clients and let down the entire legal system which counts on members of the bar to conduct themselves in an ethical manner. She has been disbarred and now faces a lengthy prison sentence.”

District Attorney Brown identified the defendant as Arelia Taveras, 46, presently of Bloomington, Minnesota. Taveras, who admitted stealing approximately \$130,000 from four clients and a colleague, pleaded guilty today before Queens Supreme Court Justice Joseph Grosso to four counts of third-degree grand larceny, one count of fourth-degree grand larceny and one count of first-degree offering a false instrument for filing. She is expected to sign a confession of judgment for approximately \$130,000, and to be sentenced on April 27, 2009, to three to nine years in prison.

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 – and in a video the defendant posted on YouTube – she said she took client money because of a gambling addiction. Taveras was disbarred in June 2007. She later filed a racketeering lawsuit in U.S. District Court in New Jersey against several casinos, accusing them of enabling her addiction. The case was dismissed, but is pending an appeal.

The case was 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 was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Carmencita N. Gutierrez, Deputy Bureau Chief of the District Attorney’s 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 Executive Assistant District Attorney.

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