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**MAJOR CRACKDOWN ON UNLICENSED GROUND TRANSPORTATION HUSTLERS
AT JFK AND LaGUARDIA AIRPORTS RESULTS IN 18 ARRESTS**

Face Up To 90 Days In Jail Under New Legislation

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Executive Director Christopher O. Ward and New York City Taxi and Limousine Commissioner Matthew W. Daus, today announced that a joint crackdown on unlicensed taxi drivers who illegally hustle passengers at the City's two major airports has resulted in 18 individuals being charged with the illegal solicitation of ground transportation.

The crackdown comes in the wake of Governor David A. Paterson signing a bill into law last month which increased penalties for unlawfully soliciting ground transportation at an airport. On October 9, 2009, Governor Paterson signed legislation elevating Section 1220-b of the Vehicle and Traffic Law – Unlawful Solicitation of Ground Transportation – from a violation to a Class B misdemeanor punishable by up to 90 days in jail and/or a fine of up to \$1,250.

District Attorney Brown said, "I commend Governor Paterson and the State Legislature – particularly Senator Martin Marlavé Dilan and Assemblyman Jeffrion L. Aubry, the bill's sponsors – for their efforts in helping to curtail illegal – and oftentimes overly aggressive – solicitation of passengers at our airports. For too long, unregulated taxis and unscrupulous drivers – who are not properly licensed and who do not carry appropriate insurance – have put passengers at serious risk. This legislation should go a long way toward putting an end to the days when airport hustlers accepted paying a minimal fine simply as a cost of doing business."

The District Attorney continued, "Each year, more than seventy million passengers travel through JFK and LaGuardia Airports – many of whom are visitors from other states and countries and are unaware of ground transportation options when they arrive at the terminal. Often, these passengers are unfamiliar with New York prices and/or U.S. currency and, as a result, are charged exorbitant rates to be driven even the shortest of distances. As tourism, one of New York's most revenue-producing industries, continues to grow, it is vitally important to our economic health that we provide a safe and welcoming environment at our airports."

Port Authority chairman Anthony Coscia said, "Last night's arrests are one part of the Port Authority's effort to remove taxi hustlers from our airports. With the new law in place, our enforcement has increased and taxi hustlers should be forewarned: this is the end of the road."

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TLC Commissioner Daus said, “Our enforcement actions have amply illustrated the value of the recent anti-hustling legislation in protecting arriving travelers from predatory illegal for-hire operators. As we had anticipated when we worked together with the taxicab and for-hire industries for the law’s passage, passengers are safer today because of it, and legitimate operators enjoy a level playing field. Airport hustlers now know that they will face prosecution to the fullest extent of a law with provisions that have true and meaningful repercussions.”

According to the criminal charges, the defendants illegally offered arriving passengers at JFK and LaGuardia Airports their services as ground transportation for hire, charging fees of \$25 to \$40 for destinations in Brooklyn and from between \$35 and \$80 for destinations in Manhattan. In most cases, the defendants previously had been warned not to enter or remain in the airports for the purpose of offering ground transportation services

The defendants were arrested yesterday and variously charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services, third-degree criminal trespass and trespass. If convicted, they each face up to 90 days in jail and/or a fine of up to \$1,250.

District Attorney Brown cited two recent airport hustling cases that clearly highlighted the need to elevate Section of 1220-b of the Vehicle and Traffic Laws, as well as the need to crack down on unlicensed taxi drivers who solicit unwitting passengers at our airports:

- On November 19, 2009, Garret C. Smith, 53, of Conyers, Georgia, pleaded guilty to second-degree assault, a Class D felony, and admitted that, on January 6, 2009, he was at the International Arrivals Terminal at JFK Airport and illegally soliciting taxi passengers. Smith further admitted that when Port Authority Police Officer Jamie Alexandersen approached to arrest him, he (Smith) fell to the ground, taking Officer Alexandersen with him and causing Officer Alexandersen to sustain a line of duty injury – a torn ligament to his knee – which has kept him out of work since the incident. Smith is to be sentenced on January 28, 2010, at which time he is expected to be sentenced to five months in jail, five years’ probation and ordered to enroll in a counseling program.
- In June 2009, Khaalif Preacher, 27, of 1384 Pacific Street, and Ian L. McFarlane, 57, of 285 East 35th Street, both of Brooklyn, were charged with steering five unsuspecting French tourists to their unauthorized van service outside JFK’s Air France terminal and then holding them against their will as the van raced approximately seven miles through sections of Queens and Brooklyn in an attempt to escape pursuing police vehicles. The tourists’ harrowing journey began when Port Authority police officers attempted to cite the defendants for “hustling” passengers at the airport. Preacher pleaded guilty to first-degree reckless endangerment, a Class D felony, on October 8, 2009, and is expected to be sentenced to six months in jail and five years’ probation when he is sentenced on December 3, 2009. The case against McFarlane is presently pending trial.

The investigation was conducted by the Port Authority Police Department under the supervision of Superintendent Michael A. Fedorko.

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The cases are being prosecuted by Catherine C. Kane, Chief of the District Attorney's Airport Investigations Unit, of the Organized Crime and Rackets Bureau, under the supervision of Gerard A. Brave, Bureau Chief, and Mark L. Katz, Deputy 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.

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

ADDENDUM (18 defendants)

KHURRAM BUTT, 34, of 104 Collias Street in Stroudsburg, PA, has been charged with third-degree criminal trespass, unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$60.

EDUIN G. CASTRO, 45, of 127-20 25th Avenue in College Point, Queens, has been charged with third-degree criminal trespass, unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$45.

ALBIN A. DURAN, 28, of 1738 Stephen Street in Ridgewood, Queens, has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$50.

SILFREDO F. FERREIRA, 41, of 562 West 186th Street in Manhattan, has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to the Bronx for \$50.

EARL C. GOVAN, 48, of 98-17 Horace Harding Boulevard in Corona, Queens, has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Brooklyn for \$35.

ALBERTO HERIDEA, 51, of 435 Bleecker Street in Brooklyn, has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Brooklyn for \$40.

FELIZ R. MEJIA, 62, of 27436 Highway 23 in Grand Gorge, NY (Delaware County), has been charged with third-degree criminal trespass, unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$45.

DEBRAY R. NUNEZ, 38, of 142-10 Hoover Avenue in Jamaica, Queens, has been charged with third-degree criminal trespass, unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Brooklyn for \$45.

ARONA R. ORTIZ, 37, of 2290 University Avenue in the Bronx, has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$40.

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YADODIAL P. RAMSUNDAR, 56, of 50 Ridge Place in Yonkers, has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Woodmere, Long Island, for \$30.

JOHN P. RAMUNNI, 58, of 3908 Maplewood Drive in Seaford, NY, has been charged with third-degree criminal trespass, unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$50.

ABDULLAH Y. SALYM, 49, of 473 Kings Highway in Brooklyn, has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$35.

MAMERTO E. SANTOS, 51, of 385 South 2nd Street in Brooklyn, has been charged with third-degree criminal trespass, unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Lexington Avenue in Manhattan for \$85.

GEORGISIMONYAN, 49, OF 315 Hamden Avenue in Staten island, has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for a fee.

JOSE A. TORRES, 60, of 311 East 178 Street in the Bronx, has been charged with third-degree criminal trespass, unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$45.

ROBERT L. VOGT, 63, of 283 Hempstead Gardens in West Hempstead, L.I., has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Manhattan for \$45.

ANDRES UMANZOR-VILLATOR, 44, of 1155 South Avenue in Stratford, CT has been charged with unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from JFK to Brooklyn for \$25.

GUANG M. ZHENG, 46, of 48 Greene Avenue in Norwich, CT, has been charged with third-degree criminal trespass, unlawful solicitation of ground transportation services and trespass for allegedly offering to drive a passenger from LaGuardia to Manhattan for \$45.

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