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**QUEENS WOMAN CHARGED WITH MANSLAUGHTER
IN FATAL MINIVAN CRASH THAT KILLED TWO CHILDREN**

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a 45-year-old Queens woman has been charged with manslaughter, among other crimes, in connection with a two-car collision at a St. Albans intersection last night in which two of the seven occupants in her car – a 15-year-old girl and a 5-year-old girl – were killed. The five other occupants – the defendant, a 43-year-old female passenger, and three preteen girls – remain hospitalized. The lone driver of the other vehicle was treated at the hospital and released.

“This case is the latest in a series of tragic motor vehicle accidents that have dominated the news in recent months – cases involving motorists who engage in high-risk behavior while driving cars packed with innocent children,” said District Attorney Brown. “As a result of the defendant’s alleged actions, the lives of two young people have been needlessly and prematurely forfeited and others have suffered serious injuries. While the defendant must live with the burden of knowing that her alleged conduct has led to two deaths and multiple injuries to others, it offers small consolation to the victims and their families.”

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Sheila Bethea, 45, of 112-02 199th Street in St. Albans. Bethea is presently awaiting arraignment in Queens Criminal Court on charges of second-degree manslaughter, second-degree assault, third-degree assault and endangering the welfare of a child. If convicted, she faces up to fifteen years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, Bethea was operating a 1995 Mazda minivan in a reckless manner shortly before 5:00 p.m. on Monday, October 26, 2009, when she crossed a double yellow line at a high rate of speed and collided with a Toyota van driven by 63-year-old Carl Williams, of Roosevelt, Long Island, at the intersection of Arcade Avenue and Dunkirk Street in the St. Albans section of Queens, fatally injuring two of her passengers – 15-year-old Katherine Willis and 5-year-old Melissa Elh-Mirra – and injuring five others and herself. It is alleged that the middle row of seats in the Mazda was missing and at least one of the children was sitting on the floor.

The children involved in the accident are believed to be the foster children of the defendant’s mother.

The investigation, which is continuing, is being conducted by police officers assigned to the New York City Police Department’s 103rd Precinct, the NYPD’s Highway Patrol District Accident Investigation Squad and the District Attorney’s Homicide Investigations Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Naomi K. Schneidmill, of the District Attorney’s Homicide Investigations Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys John W. Kosinski, Chief of the District Attorney’s Vehicular Homicide Unit, Peter T. Reese, Bureau Chief, and Peter J. McCormack III, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Charles A. Testagrossa and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

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