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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2009

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NEWS ADVISORY

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced that Sheila Bethea, 45, of 112-02 199th Street in St. Albans, was arraigned this evening before Queens Criminal Court Judge Mary R. O'Donoghue on a 12-count criminal complaint charging her with two counts of second-degree manslaughter, two counts of second-degree assault, three counts of third-degree assault and five counts of endangering the welfare of a child. If convicted, she faces up to fifteen years in prison.

Bethea is charged with operating a 1995 Mazda minivan in a reckless manner shortly before 5:00 p.m. on Monday, October 26, 2009, and crossing a double yellow line at a high rate of speed and colliding 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 – Katherine Willis, 15, and Melissa Elh-Mirra, 5 – and injuring four other passengers – Fatou Sonko, 43, Tatiyana Bethea, 5, Camera Sedonovich, 10, and Allyahh Garcia, 11 – and herself.

Four of the five girls are the foster children of the defendant's mother. The fifth girl, Tatiyana Bethea, was legally adopted by the defendant's mother. Sonko's relationship with the defendant or the girls is unknown at this time.

District Attorney Brown said that at arraignment a notice of statement was filed with the court in which Bethea allegedly made an oral statement to police in which she allegedly admitted, that on Monday, October 26th, she had smoked crack cocaine around 1 or 2 a.m., that she had done heroin around 9 a.m. and that she had drank one alcoholic beverage around noon on that day. She allegedly further admitted that she knew she was driving fast, probably around 45 miles per hour and that she lost control of the car because there was a donut as the back wheel. Finally, it is alleged that she admitted that she had the 5 kids in the car and that she did not know that the five-year-olds needed car seats.

Judge O'Donoghue ordered Bethea held on \$500,000 bail and to return to court on November 12, 2009.

Bethea was represented for arraignment purposes only by Rochelle Berliner (718-261-3000).

It should be noted that a complaint is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: E-version of this press release posted at www.queensda.org