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SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CHARGED WITH DWI
AFTER ALLEGEDLY ARRIVING INTOXICATED AT QUEENS HIGH SCHOOL

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a 45-year-old school bus driver has been charged with recklessly endangering the lives of five special education students when he allegedly showed up at their Jamaica, Queens, high school in an intoxicated condition to drive them home.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant is accused of getting behind the wheel of his school bus while under the influence of alcohol. As a school bus driver, the defendant had a responsibility to drive students to school and bring them home safely. Anything that impedes that responsibility – such as even a drop of alcohol – cannot be tolerated."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Lakhram Omwathath, 45, of 242 Norwood Avenue in Brooklyn. Omwathath, who has worked as a driver for Safe Coach, Inc., of Brooklyn, for approximately 27 years, is presently awaiting arraignment in Queens Criminal Court on charges of second-degree reckless endangerment, attempted endangering the welfare of a child and operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If convicted, he faces up to a year in jail.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, Omwathath approached Stephen Fucarino, the assistant principal of Thomas A. Edison High School (located at 165-65 84th Avenue in Jamaica), outside the school yesterday at approximately 2:45 p.m. to discuss an issue before taking off on his usual school bus run. At the time, Omwathath's bus was parked and occupied by five students – each under the age of 17 – who were waiting for him to drive them home. During their discussion, the assistant principal allegedly observed Omwathath to have an odor of alcohol on his breath, slurred speech, bloodshot eyes and to be unsteady on his feet. The police were notified and it is alleged that they similarly observed Omwathath to be in an intoxicated condition. Omwathath allegedly made statements to police to the effect that he did drive the bus to the school and that he took "Nyquil and a non-alcoholic Dr. Pepper." An intoxilyzer exam administered to the defendant allegedly resulted in a reading of .037 of one percent blood alcohol content.

The investigation was conducted by police officers assigned to the New York City Police Department's 107th Precinct.

The case will be prosecuted by the District Attorney's Criminal Court Bureau.

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.