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Release # 110-2010
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 2010

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**TWO ALLEGED CON WOMEN CHARGED UNDER HATE CRIMES STATUTE
WITH PREDATORY SCHEME TARGETING ELDERLY MEN**

*Allegedly Bilked One Victim Out of \$5,000 for Kidney To Be Bought Purportedly On Black Market;
Two Other Victims Allegedly Marked To Pay Thousands For Defendants' Dental Work*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that two Flushing women have been charged under New York State's Hate Crime Law with stealing more than \$31,000 from three elderly men – aged 78 to 84 – and with attempting to steal more than \$50,000 in additional funds from the same victims. In one instance, the defendants allegedly posed as mother and daughter and claimed they needed \$5,000 to buy the younger of the defendants a kidney on the black market in order to keep her alive.

District Attorney Brown said, "Under the provisions of New York State's Hate Crimes Act of 2000, enhanced charges can be filed when a defendant commits a larceny and selects his or her victim because of their age which is defined as being 60 years of age or older. Crimes against the elderly – whether they involve physical or, in this case, financial harm – are despicable because the victims are often lonely and vulnerable."

The District Attorney continued, "In this particular case, the defendants are alleged to have chosen their victims in a very calculating manner: preying on elderly men they spotted walking alone in the vicinity of one of Queens' main thoroughfares. Over the course of several weeks and months, the defendants allegedly insinuated themselves in their victims' lives, while at the same time stealing or attempting to steal thousands of dollars from their unsuspecting victims."

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Gina L. Miller, 39, and Sylvia Johns, 23, both of 45-12 202nd Street in the Flushing section of Queens. Miller – who also uses Lisa and Lori as her first name – and Johns were arraigned last night before Queens Criminal Court Judge Ira Margulis on charges of second-degree attempted grand larceny as a hate crime, third-degree grand larceny as a hate crime, second-degree attempted grand larceny, third-degree grand larceny, first-degree identity theft and first-degree scheme to defraud. The defendants, who each face up to fifteen years in prison if convicted, were each ordered held on \$100,000 bail with a bail sufficiency hearing and to return to court on July 6, 2010.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the criminal charges, Miller approached an 84-year-old man walking alone on Woodhaven Boulevard in November 2009 and introduced herself as Lisa Miller. It is alleged that after she befriended the man – requesting his telephone number and address – she then telephoned him repeatedly over the next several months and went to his apartment with Johns and a third unapprehended female several times a week. During this time, the victim allegedly discovered that his Queens County Savings Bank account information was missing from

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his file cabinet along with a debit/credit card for the account.

Unbeknownst to him, a letter was received by Queens County Savings Bank on March 26, 2010, that had been purportedly signed by him and requested that the account be closed and that a check in the amount of the balance of the account – in excess of \$50,000 – be mailed to his home. It is additionally alleged that numerous ATM cash withdrawals and store purchases – utilizing the victim's debit card – were made in and around Queens County and elsewhere between February 12, 2010, and March 28, 2010, and that one store video depicted the two defendants and the unapprehended third female making a purchase using the victim's debit card. It is further alleged that on February 12, 2010, Johns submitted an application at Tooth, a dental office in Fresh Meadows, to open a line of credit in the victim's name to pay for dental work.

In the second instance, it is alleged that Miller (using the first name Lori) and Johns befriended a 79-year-old man in the vicinity of Woodhaven Boulevard in February 2010. Thereafter, it is alleged the two defendants went to the victim's apartment numerous times over the next few weeks and that after one occasion, the victim noticed that money was missing from his bedroom drawer and that his passport was missing from his apartment.

On February 19, 2010, it is alleged that Miller went to Tooth and, using the victim's last name as her own and the victim's missing passport, submitted two applications for lines of credit in the victim's name – who she alleged was her grandfather – to pay for dental work she received and \$14,000 in credit under the victim's name.

Finally, in the third instance, Miller and Johns (posing as mother and daughter) allegedly approached a 78-year-old man walking alone in May 2010, and stated that Johns was dying and in need of a kidney transplant and asked if he could give them the money to buy a kidney on the black market. After driving him home that day and requesting his phone number, the victim allegedly began receiving telephone calls from the two defendants who also came to his residence on several occasions, during which he observed them going through his paperwork and mail. It is alleged that the victim did give \$5,000 to the two defendants based upon their representation that they required the money to buy a kidney. On June 8, 2010, Miller and Johns drove the victim to Tooth and that they applied for a dental loan in the name of the victim in order to pay for dental work for Miller.

The case came to light when Queens Savings Bank notified the 84-year-old victim of the letter they had received, requesting closure of the account, and the victim went to authorities.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Robert Salvatore and Michael Curley and Sergeant Bradford Miller who are assigned to the New York City Police Department's 102nd Precinct's Detective Squad.

Assistant District Attorney Kristen A. Kane, Chief of the District Attorney's Elder Fraud Unit, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gregory C. Pavlides, Chief of the District Attorney's Economic Crimes Bureau, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of the Investigations Division Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

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