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**TWO NEW YORK MEN CHARGED WITH DRUG POSSESSION AFTER 10 KILOS
OF HEROIN FOUND HIDDEN IN CRATE WITH DOG SHIPPED TO JFK AIRPORT**

*Dog Used As Mule To Allegedly Traffic \$1 Million In Drugs From Puerto Rico To New York;
Defendants Face Up To 20 Years In Prison If Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by New York City Police Department Commissioner James P. O'Neill, today announced that two men from Bronx and Putnam Counties have been charged with drug possession and conspiracy after ten kilos (22.046 pounds) of heroin were found hidden in the false bottom of a dog crate containing a cream-colored Shepherd-type dog that had been shipped from Puerto Rico to New York. The drugs have an alleged estimated street value in excess of \$1 million.

District Attorney Brown said, "It's alleged that man's best friend was used in an attempt to smuggle drugs into the city, but great police work led to the seizure of more than 10 kilograms of heroin concealed within a dog crate. The defendants are alleged to have conspired to bring the drugs to New York City and elsewhere. If convicted, the defendants face considerable time behind bars."

The District Attorney continued, "Statistics show that, unfortunately, heroin has made a comeback in New York City and its surrounding suburbs, with fatal overdoses outpacing homicides. Drug dealers should be forewarned – New York City is not the place to import or sell illegal narcotics. My office is committed to working closely with the NYPD and our other law enforcement colleagues in stopping this epidemic and to prosecute all those involved in the trafficking, distribution and selling of illegal drugs.

Police Commissioner O'Neill said, "This amount of heroin, when distributed at the street level, would jeopardize numerous lives and undoubtedly contribute to other crime. No matter how, or from where, you traffic illegal drugs into New York City, you will be tracked-down and prosecuted through these coordinated enforcement operations."

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Samuel Seabrooks, 35, of the Bronx, and Carlos Betancourt-Morales, 27, of Carmel (Putnam County), New York. Both defendants were arraigned last night on a criminal complaint charging them with first-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance and second-degree conspiracy before Queens Criminal Court Judge Gia Morris. Judge Morris set bail at \$500,000 bond/\$250,000 cash for each defendant along with a bail sufficiency hearing and ordered the defendants to return to court on April 10, 2017. If convicted, the defendants face up to 20 years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, Seabrooks and Betancourt-Morales met up at a Bronx IHOP restaurant at approximate 6:00 p.m. on Friday, March 24, 2017, and then traveled in separate vehicles to American Airlines Priority Parcel Services at JFK Airport. Arriving at

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the location, at approximately 7:00 p.m., it is alleged that Betancourt-Morales exited his vehicle and approached Seabrook's vehicle and the two men had a brief conversation. A short time later, Betancourt-Morales allegedly entered the cargo building and signed an American Airlines cargo air waybill delivery receipt that gave him authorization to accept a crate containing an mixed-breed Shepherd-type dog and which had a chargeable weight of approximately 86 pounds. Betancourt-Morales was stopped by police as he was allegedly pushing the crate on a rolling cart toward the building's exit.

On the afternoon of March 25, 2017, a court-authorized search warrant was executed on the dog crate. Police allegedly recovered ten packages containing heroin. Each of the packages was allegedly in brick form, packaged in dark and clear plastic wrap, and was three to four inches in width and six to eight inches in length. The packages allegedly contained stamps with the Nike Swoosh and a five-pointed star.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Charles Cadiz, of the New York City Police Department's Animal Cruelty Investigation Squad, under the supervision of Commanding Officer Sergeant Michael Murphy, and under the overall supervision of Deputy Chief James Luongo.

District Attorney Brown would also like to thank members of the Office of the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration for their assistance in the investigation.

Assistant District Attorney Michelle Johnson Holmes, of District Attorney Brown's Narcotics Investigations Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Wilbert J. LeMelle, Bureau Chief, Mark L. Katz, Deputy Bureau Chief, Julie S. Trivedi, Section Chief and Philip Anderson, Supervisor, and Assistant District Attorney Nicoletta J. Caferra, Chief of District Attorney Brown's Animal Cruelty Unit of the Special Proceedings Bureau under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Anthony M. Communiello, Bureau Chief, and Oscar W. Ruiz, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco.

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