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QUEENS DISTRICT ATTORNEY RICHARD A. BROWN
DELIVERS YEAR-END MESSAGE TO THE RESIDENTS OF QUEENS COUNTY

*Highlights Include Continued Crime Reduction Throughout County;
Cites Meaningful Prosecutions And Investigations Of 2018*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown delivered his year-end message to the residents of Queens County in which he noted that Queens County was again among the City's leaders in crime reduction in 2018.

Based on preliminary statistics released by the New York City Police Department, Queens County has seen an overall 2.7 percent decline in serious crime from the previous year. The downward turn was led by an 11.4 percent drop in robberies and a 17.2 percent drop in burglaries.

Queens District Attorney Brown said, "This was another extremely successful year for the Queens District Attorney's Office. In 2017, we had a record low number of homicides in Queens County and 2018 continued the trend with remarkably fewer homicides than in the past. This last year, there were 63 murders. This is a dramatic change from just over 25 years ago when I became the district attorney. In 1992, there were 341 murders. This astounding decrease in deaths makes a real difference in the lives of the people of Queens."

"I believe without a shadow of a doubt, that we are the best prosecutor's office in this great nation," continued the District Attorney. "This year we handled nearly 50,000 arrests. Each and every one of those cases were handled judiciously, efficiently and fairly. We have consistently maintained the best arrest to arraignment time in the City. Faster than any other borough, we get our police officers back where they can do the most good - on the streets fighting crime and protecting our citizens."

Continuing, said the District Attorney, "This also means that not every defendant goes to jail. Every individual arrested is arraigned and in Queens a faster arrest to arraignment time means most defendants end up going home after seeing a judge - several hours earlier than anywhere else in New York City."

The District Attorney stated that this office is not just focused on prosecuting criminals, but also working on innovative ways to combat criminal activity and to help those truly in need when they come in contact with the judicial system.

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“To combat the ever-growing opioid epidemic in Queens County,” the District Attorney said, “we are taking the necessary steps to intervene and help abusers of this highly-addictive drug. The Queens Treatment Intervention Program, better known as QTIP, is our newest initiative to strike down the skyrocketing numbers of overdose deaths and near deaths. For misdemeanor non-violent defendants, QTIP provides clinical assessments, treatment options and the possibility of getting not only a clean slate with an ACD (adjournment in contemplation of dismissal), but also a clean start for a drug-free future.”

To date, not a single person participating in QTIP has received any jail time. We have also had several success stories, said the District Attorney, including a new beginning for a young pregnant woman who entered the program. The young lady was so addicted to drugs, she was shooting two bundles (20 bags) of heroin every day. We helped her get into a facility to detox and afterwards picked her up and personally took her to a state-sponsored addiction treatment facility, where she completed a six-week program. The young lady gave birth in July 2018 and has since been reunited with her baby, is doing well and continuing her out-patient treatment here in Queens.

District Attorney Brown said, “In 2018, there were 63 homicides – the fifth lowest number of homicides since 1965 when Lyndon B. Johnson was president, when gas was 31 cents a gallon and the Beatles played at Shea - the first rock concert in a stadium.”

The citizens of Queens County are safer in their homes, on the streets of our neighborhoods and in our community parks, businesses and entertainment venues because fewer people are being killed, injured and maimed by senseless violence.

District Attorney Brown said, “During the more than 25 years since I had the privilege and honor of becoming the District Attorney of Queens County, my office has steadfastly committed itself to ensuring the safety of those who live, work and visit our borough.

“Through our law-enforcement initiatives and the implementation of an array of groundbreaking interventions and prevention programs, we have made incredible progress in accomplishing that goal,” said the District Attorney. “In turn, Queens has contributed profoundly to New York City’s historic decline in serious and violent crime. According to preliminary statistical data provided by the NYPD, over the last twenty-five years overall crime in Queens is down by 82.5 percent. Murders – a benchmark for both prosecutors and police – have fallen 77.6 percent and burglaries are down 89.2 percent, robberies are down 85.2 percent, grand larcenies are down 51.1 percent, rapes are down 30.8 percent, felony assaults are down 42.3 percent, and auto thefts are down an astounding 96.3 percent.”

District Attorney Brown highlighted these cases as just a few of the office’s many successful prosecutions and investigations in the year 2018:

- **People v. Oscar Morel.** Morel, who was convicted at trial in the slaying death of an Imam and his associate in August 2016, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. The defendant gunned down a Muslim cleric and his assistant after the two men left an Ozone Park mosque. The defendant received the maximum penalty permitted under the law.
- **People v. Raymond Gillespie.** Gillespie was convicted at trial in October for a second time - after his first conviction was overturned due to a judicial error.

Gillespie was found guilty of raping his ex and sexually assaulting the woman's new boyfriend with a metal rod. Gillespie was ordered to serve 50 years in prison.

- **People v. Timothy West.** West, a persistent felon, was convicted at trial in June of burglary and other crimes for a series of home break-ins where jewelry, video games, electric shavers and other household items were taken. West is currently serving 34 years to life in prison.
- **People v. Yonatan Galvez-Marin.** Galvez-Marin, was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison following a jury trial conviction in the heinous stabbing death of a 60-year-old woman. The victim was a few feet from her home in Jamaica, Queens, in August 2016, when the defendant approached her, asked for money and then plunged a knife into her chest.
- **People v. Elizabeth O'Sullivan and Lee Vargas.** O'Sullivan and Vargas are awaiting sentencing after a jury convicted the married couple of sex trafficking in October. Using both physical violence and intimidation, the pair forced a young woman into prostitution. The two face up to 25 years in prison when sentenced in February 2019.
- **People v. MS-13 Gang and Others.** Dozens of reputed members of violent street gangs, including MS-13, Crips, Bloods and ABK were apprehended following long-term investigations and variously charged with illegal possession of weapons, conspiracy to kill rival gang members, conspiracy to execute a former gang member and more. In June 2018, four members of the ABK (Always Bangin' Kings) were convicted and sentenced to prison on gun charges.
- **People v. Santiago Reyes.** Reyes, who was sentenced to 16 years in prison, was found guilty at trial of kidnapping and raping a 15-year-old girl he met online and manipulated into running away with him when she and her family visited New York from Canada. The defendant was 27 at the time of the crime.
- **People v. Accused Credit Card Forgery Ring.** An investigation led to the dismantling of a complex counterfeit credit card ring and the arrests of two defendants charged with grand larceny, criminal possession of stolen property and more. The two defendants are accused of forging credit cards and making more than \$100,000 in fraudulent purchases. The case is currently pending.
- **People v. Elizabeth Grant.** Grant was convicted at trial of 108-counts of animal cruelty after 67 ill and ailing cats and dogs were rescued from the woman's Jackson Heights home. Some of the animals were so sick they had to be euthanized. This defendant was re-arrested in August 2018 and now faces new animal cruelty and assault charges for attacking a probation officer, who discovered the defendant allegedly in possession of numerous dogs, cats, guinea pigs and other animals after being banned from owning pets.
- **People v. "Jackpotter."** A male defendant is currently awaiting trial for allegedly "jackpotting" bank ATMs. The Flushing resident is accused of hacking into several

automatic teller computers and causing the devices to shoot out cash like a casino slot machine. Nearly \$250,000 was allegedly stolen.

- **People v. Lorenzo Arline.** The Brooklyn resident is currently serving 150 years in prison following a jury conviction in May for repeatedly raping his two stepdaughters, who bore eight children as a result of the years-long abuse.
- **People v. Stephen Peters.** In 2017, Peters was sentenced to 30 years to life in prison for the February 2013 execution-style shooting death of a Richmond Hill man, who was bound with electrical cords, robbed of his bank card and then shot several times in the head before his apartment was set ablaze to cover up the crime. In July 2018, Peters was tried on charges the first jury could not reach a verdict on and found guilty of murder, robbery, burglary and kidnapping charges and sentenced to life in prison.
- **People v. Dr. Robert Rho.** Dr. Rho pleaded guilty to criminally negligent homicide in the death of a patient, who died as a result of a botched surgical procedure in July 2016. The physician was sentenced to up to four years in prison.
- **People v. Alexander Bonich.** A jury convicted Bonich of second-degree murder in the shooting death of a man who was moving to the United States from Europe. The victim, who had been cheated out of nearly \$100,000 and conned by the defendant, was shot in the back in Astoria Park in January 2015. Bonich was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.
- **People v. Giovanni Olivo.** Olivo pleaded guilty to aggravated animal cruelty for stabbing and throwing a cat from a balcony and then stomping the feline to death on the street. The Rockaway resident was sentenced to 10 months in jail and is banned from owning, possessing or residing with any animals for five years.
- **People v. Meher Kalam.** The defendant pleaded guilty to a hate crime for his racially-motivated attack on an MTA worker at a Forest Hills Subway station in June 2018. Kalam was sentenced to three and a half years in prison.

“Even with overall crime spiraling to record lows,” District Attorney Brown said, “other critical issues are impacting our communities in detrimental ways. Today, fentanyl is the deadliest drug in America. Over the last several years, heroin mixed with the synthetic drug fentanyl -- an opioid painkiller thirty to fifty times more potent than heroin -- has been killing people of all genders, races, ages and socio-economic status. The two drugs combined make a deadly cocktail. As a result, we’ve seen staggering numbers of fatal overdoses – far outpacing homicides in Queens County. Preliminary numbers for 2018, show there were 229 cases of suspected fatal drug overdoses in Queens County, with nearly a third of those cases involving fentanyl – which is why my office began to track people who sell drugs mixed with fentanyl. In one of the first cases brought by my office, a drug dealer was charged in July 2017, with recklessly endangering lives for knowingly selling and possessing narcotic drugs containing fentanyl.”

District Attorney Brown added, “My office commenced an investigation in response to two non-fatal overdoses. The defendant, Bernard Lewis pleaded guilty to criminal sale of a controlled substance and was sentenced in May 2018, to four years in prison.”

District Attorney Brown continued, “Sadly, there are people who would hurt the most innocent of our community - defenseless animals. My office takes a very strong stand against any and all instances of animal cruelty. That’s why in 2016, I created the first **Animal Cruelty Prosecutions Unit** in New York City, led by Chief Nicoletta J. Caferri, in order to aggressively enforce the laws that protect animals from harm. This past year, the unit successfully prosecuted two dog fighters, a woman who hoarded more than 60 cats and dogs in a filthy home and a man who stabbed and threw a cat from a balcony. In all of these cases, the defendants have been banned from owning and/or possessing any animals in the near future and are required to register with the New York City Department of Health as animal abusers, which will prevent city shelters, rescue groups and/or pet stores from permitting them to purchase or adopt an animal.”

As the chief law enforcement officer for the most diverse county in America, District Attorney Brown wanted to reach into those communities and provide assistance where needed and established the **Office of Immigrant Affairs** in 2015. Having just completed its fourth year of operations, OIA has built a well-deserved reputation for excellence, dedication and effectiveness under the leadership of Director Carmencita N. Gutierrez. Throughout the year, OIA has helped members of the immigrant community, including those visiting Queens County, who may have been victimized obtain justice through the legal system. The Office also provides support and guidance to those who need assistance in other areas related to criminal law. The Office has also been instrumental in assisting other prosecutors offices in developing similar initiatives.

District Attorney Brown continued, “My office has always had a singular mission - to provide those who live in Queens County a better quality of life through increased public safety and a meaningful reduction in crime all year long. In 2018, we worked vigorously to pursue hate crimes against those individuals who chose their victims based on religion, sexuality, the color of their skin and other factors, in addition, to those who targeted senior citizens.”

Prosecuting hate crimes has long been a priority of the Queens District Attorney’s Office. As District Attorney Brown noted, “My office in 1987 was the first District Attorney’s Office in New York City to establish a **Hate Crimes Unit** specifically focused on the prosecution of individuals who victimize others based on their own prejudices. The Unit, under the leadership of Chief Mariela Palomino Herring, also engages in community outreach and partners with local organizations to educate the community on how hate crimes are investigated and prosecuted. Hate crimes – whether motivated by sexual orientation, gender, religious or ethnic bias – tear at the very fabric of our society. We will never tolerate bigotry and racism in this county, which we all call home.”

Continuing, the DA said, “We have aggressively gone after illegal cigarette traffickers, organized trademark counterfeiting rings, bogus credit card manufacturing crews and legitimate businesses that annually cheat the government out of millions of dollars in much needed State and City tax revenue.”

The District Attorney’s **Crimes Against Revenue Unit** (CARU) prosecuted almost 40 defendants for their involvement in the trafficking of untaxed cigarettes. In addition, more than 116,000 packs of cigarettes – including those with counterfeit stamps and out-of-state stamps – were seized. Another 190,000 counterfeit New York State and/or New York City tax stamps were confiscated with a value of \$1.2 million. Since CARU’s inception in 2011, the Unit is responsible for the recovery of more than \$12.6 million in funds to the State that were seized, forfeited or received as restitution for cigarettes, as well as other tax-related cases. Furthermore, the Unit is

responsible for an additional \$11 million in revenue loss prevention through the seizure of those untaxed cigarettes.

“Bootleggers who peddle untaxed cigarettes cheat the public by failing to contribute their fair share to the City and State,” said District Attorney Brown. “For every dollar or two dollars a store owner or a consumer saves by buying an untaxed pack of cigarettes, the honest taxpayer becomes the victim by having to dig deeper into his or her pockets to pay higher taxes. It cheats the government as well by fueling an underground economy.”

Furthermore, the District Attorney added, that “we also focus on the more local, quality of life concerns, such as burglaries, home invasions and combating graffiti, which leads to decreased property values and is expensive to remove.”

“We continue to focus on protecting the youngest among us, by aggressively pursuing those who trade vile child sexual abuse images online. My office’s **Sex Trafficking Unit**, led by Chief Jessica L. Melton, is relentless when it comes to prosecuting those who force women - many of them teenagers - into the degrading sex trade industry. We are the leader in prosecuting sex trafficking cases in New York City.”

District Attorney Brown added, “Throughout the country, the Queens District Attorney’s Office is known as a leader in the number of court-authorized wiretaps we handle - enhancing our investigations and strengthening our prosecutions of criminal organizations that bring violence, drugs, thefts and fraud into our communities.”

“As I stated earlier,” the District Attorney continued, “our office doesn’t just prosecute those accused of crimes. We are dedicated to helping prevent crime in the first place. My **Special Prosecutions Division**, led by Executive Assistant District Attorney Jesse J. Sligh, works diligently to steer young people away from trouble and put them on a path of success by running a host of crime prevention, school-based and community outreach programs. Members of the Special Prosecutions team also have a presence at all of the diverse communities of our borough. They attend precinct council and community board meetings.”

The DA continued that the office also has dedicated **Child Advocacy** and **Family Justice Centers**. Our **Domestic Violence Bureau** maintains the highest domestic violence conviction rate and the lowest dismissal rate of any other prosecutor’s office in the City.

In 2018, the DA’s Office working with the NYPD launched a new program called the Domestic Violence Strategic Threat Alert Team (DV STAT). The mission of this program is to enhance victim safety and hold accused batterers accountable by identifying and strengthening the prosecution of high priority domestic abuse cases - even before perpetrators have been apprehended. This coordination with the NYPD ensures that crucial evidence, such as video surveillance, text messages and social media postings can be preserved immediately and potentially used to secure search warrants and other avenues to pursue justice for victims.

On October 20, 2018, the Queens District Attorney’s Office co-sponsored its second summons warrant forgiveness event in Queens County. Entitled **Second Chance**, the event offered a unique opportunity for individuals with outstanding summons warrants for various low-level offenses (pink summonses) – such as disorderly conduct, consumption of alcohol in public, trespassing or unlawful possession of marijuana – to have their cases resolved without fear of being

arrested. We were able to adjudicate more than 350 summonses for the roughly 400 people who attended the event.”

The DA is committed to serving the people of Queens with the most skilled and professional prosecutors anywhere in the country. With that goal in mind, the Office’s **Trial Advocacy** Bureau, under the guidance of Director Kevin M. Duddy, has a staff dedicated to creating and implementing training programs that are specifically tailored to the needs of assistant district attorneys at various stages of their professional development - from incoming assistants to seasoned veterans.

District Attorney Brown concluded his year-end message by saying, “I am extremely optimistic about the coming year and our future. We will continue to work tirelessly to make sure everyone who lives, works and visits Queens County feels safe and secure. We are dedicated to partnering with our law enforcement colleagues to continue to drive down crime and give each and every citizen a better quality of life in 2019.”

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