



JOHN M. RYAN
ACTING DISTRICT

DISTRICT ATTORNEY QUEENS COUNTY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568
(718) 286-6000

Release # 114-2019
www.queensda.org
[twitter@ActingQDARyan](https://twitter.com/ActingQDARyan)

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CONTACT: QDA 718 286-6315
NYPD 646 610-6700

**QUEENS GRAND JURY INDICTS SEVEN INDIVIDUALS
FOR OPERATING COMPLEX GAMBLING ENTERPRISE
THAT STRETCHED FROM ASTORIA TO COSTA RICA**

Queens Acting District Attorney John M. Ryan, joined by New York City Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill, today announced that a Queens County grand jury has indicted seven individuals for enterprise corruption for allegedly operating an illegal gambling enterprise based in Astoria, Queens. The defendants allegedly used an 800 phone line and a wire room set up in Costa Rica to take bets dating back to January 2016 to the present.

The defendants are variously charged in a 39-count indictment with enterprise corruption – a violation of New York State's Organized Crime Control Act – as well as first-degree promoting gambling, third-degree money laundering, fifth-degree conspiracy and other crimes. The defendants were arraigned before Queens Supreme Court Justice Leslie Leach yesterday.

Acting District Attorney Ryan said, "This Office - working collaboratively with our law enforcement colleagues – have taken down a number of illegal gambling operations over the years. Putting these kinds of illegal enterprises out of business, saves untold numbers of people from financial devastation."

NYPD Commissioner O'Neill said, "The NYPD and its law enforcement partners are committed to driving down crime beyond the current historical lows in New York City. It is due to this cooperation that this investigation involving enterprise corruption has successfully resulted in this indictment. I commend and thank the attorneys from the Queens District Attorney's Office for bringing this case forward, and the NYPD investigators for their dedication in this investigation."

The District Attorney's Office identified the alleged boss of the gambling ring as Michael Regan, who is accused of acting as the bookmaker and controlled and oversaw the entire operation and profited from each bet placed. Robert Brieger is alleged to have been Regan's master agent, head clerk and accounts manager. Luan Bexheti, a close associate of the boss, allegedly was a runner and agent for the illegal enterprise and four others are accused of being wire room managers, runners, agents or clerks. **(See Addendum for details on each defendant).**

According to the District Attorney's Office, the investigation leading to today's arrests began in January 2016 with the NYPD's Criminal Enterprise Division looking into sports betting within Queens County and beyond. The investigation included physical surveillance and court-authorized electronic eavesdropping that intercepted thousands of allegedly incriminating gambling-related conversations, as well as text messages over mobile phones.

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Acting DA Ryan said that, according to the indictment, the defendants in this case conspired to make money illegally through the operation of unlawful gambling that accepted bets on sporting events through a wire room located in Astoria, Queens and an internet wire room located off shore in Costa Rica, where sports gambling is legal. Bettors could wager several different ways - gamblers could place a bet by using the website's toll free phone number, log onto the website, give their bet to an agent or actually go to the wire room in Astoria, Queens.

The wire room in Costa Rica was used primarily for bets placed online, according to the indictment, said Acting DA Ryan. The traditional wire room in Queens was located at 45-15 30 Ave., in Astoria.

According to the indictment, six of the seven defendants were heard participating in numerous phone conversations talking about the illegal gambling operation and loan sharking. The defendants discussed gamblers' accounts, cash transfers, interest rates and other details.

Continuing, said Acting DA Ryan, detectives allegedly observed various members of the crime organization meeting in both Queens and Nassau counties where money was exchanged in white envelopes or bags.

During the morning arrests yesterday, police allegedly seized gambling records, computers and \$47,000 in cash.

The investigation was conducted by the New York City Police Department's Criminal Enterprise Investigation Division.

Former assistant district attorney Naomi Schneidmill also assisting in the investigation.

Assistant District Attorney John L. Mason, of the District Attorney's Organized Crime and Rackets Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gerard A. Brave, Bureau Chief, Catherine C. Kane and Mary Lowenburg, Deputy Bureau Chiefs, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Wilbert J. LeMelle.

It should be noted that an indictment is merely an accusation and that defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted on www.queensda.org.

ADDENDUM

Six of the seven defendants below were arraigned yesterday before Queens Supreme Court Justice Leslie Leach. The defendants were released on their own recognizance upon surrender of their passports and ordered to return to court on July 16, 2019.

MICHAEL REGAN, 61, of Centerpoint, in Long Island, is the alleged Boss/Bookmaker. Regan is

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charged with enterprise corruption, first-degree promoting gambling, third- and fourth-degree money laundering and fifth-degree conspiracy.

ROBERT BRIEGER, 70, of Rego Park, Queens, is the alleged master agent, head clerk and money manger. Breiger is charged with enterprise corruption, first-degree promoting gambling, fourth-degree money laundering and fifth-degree conspiracy. Breiger's apprehension is pending his extradition from Costa Rica.

LUAN BEXHETI, 47, of Astoria, Queens, is the alleged primary agent and runner. Bexheti is charged with enterprise corruption, first-degree promoting gambling, third- and fourth-degree money laundering, second-degree criminal usury and fifth-degree conspiracy.

GERALD SCHNEIDER, 67, of Middle Village, Queens, is the alleged agent and manager of the local wire room. Schneider is charged with enterprise corruption, first-degree promoting gambling, fourth-degree money laundering and fifth-degree conspiracy.

ROBERT UTNICK, 54, of Bayside, Queens, is the alleged agent and runner. Utnick is charged with enterprise corruption, first-degree promoting gambling, third- and fourth-degree money laundering, second-degree criminal usury and fifth-degree conspiracy.

JOHN OTTOMANO, 53, of Roslyn in Long Island, is the alleged agent and runner. Ottomano is charged with enterprise corruption, first-degree promoting gambling and fifth-degree conspiracy.

LISA NINO, 36, of Middle Village, Queens, is the alleged local wire room clerk and runner. Nino is charged with enterprise corruption, first-degree promoting gambling, fourth-degree money laundering and fifth-degree conspiracy.

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