



**RICHARD A. BROWN**  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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

Release # 134-2006  
[www.queensda.org](http://www.queensda.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 2006

**CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE**  
(718) 286-6315

**D.A. BROWN: PHONY DOCTOR CHARGED**  
**WITH SCAMMING TRAVELERS AT JFK AIRPORT**

*Allegedly Pretended To Be Mugging Victim Needing Cash To Get Back To Patients In New Jersey*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a 29-year-old New Jersey man has been charged with scamming nearly a dozen air travelers –including a flight attendant, a police captain and a rabbi – out of more than \$800 in purportedly needed cab fare over a two-month period by pretending to be an out-of-town physician victimized by robbers and who needed money to get back to his patients in New Jersey. The alleged scam took place in and around John F. Kennedy International Airport late last year and into the beginning of this year.

District Attorney Brown said, “The ‘stranger in distress’ scam is commonly employed by scam artists who prey on the good nature of susceptible individuals. By allegedly pretending to be a physician in need in order to gain people’s confidence and exploit their kindness, the defendant did far more damage than just allegedly steal money from his victims – he stole their trust in others, making them less likely to help the truly needed in the future.”

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Michael Cosmi, 29, of 179 Kiwanis Drive in Wayne, New Jersey. He is being held pending arraignment in Queens Criminal Court on charges of Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree, Petit Larceny and Fraudulent Accosting. If convicted, he faces up to four years in prison.

The District Attorney said that, according to the charges, the defendant was observed at various locations in and around John F. Kennedy International Airport between December 11, 2005 and February 16, 2006. In nearly all instances, it is alleged that the victims overheard the defendant talking on a cell phone and claiming to be either “Dr. Michael Harris” or “Dr. Michael Stanley.” In some cases, he is alleged to have claimed to have been robbed or have been the victim of a pickpocket and that he had no way of getting back to the (fictitious) Brigantine Hospital in New Jersey to care for his patients. He would then allegedly request money from his victims with the promise of paying them back. The ten victims allegedly each gave the defendants sums of cash ranging from \$75 to \$100. None of the victims were ever reimbursed.

District Attorney Brown expressed his appreciation to Ed Lowe, a columnist with the Long Island Press, whose exposure of the defendant’s alleged actions led to today’s felony charges.

The investigation was conducted by Police Officer Adil Almontaser, Detective William Kehoe and Sergeant Boris Perdomo, of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Police Department under the supervision of Lieutenant William Hanley and Inspector Anthony Fitzgerald; Metropolitan Transit Authority Police Officers Robert Rao and Jeffery Hu and Sergeant Michael Costanza, under the supervision of Lieutenant Steven Rios; and members of the District Attorney’s Detective Squad.

Assistant District Attorney Joseph G. D’Arrigo, of the District Attorney’s Economic Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that a criminal complaint is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

#

**Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at [www.queensda.org](http://www.queensda.org).**