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**QUEENS DISTRICT ATTORNEY MELINDA KATZ
ON TODAY'S COURT PROCEEDINGS TO RELEASE RIKERS INMATES**

As the highly-contagious coronavirus spreads throughout our City and communities, Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz and the Office's senior staff are carefully reviewing many requests for defendants to be immediately released from the City's jails. The Office collaborates with defense attorneys, the Mayor's Office and the Department of Corrections to identify those whose release would serve the interests of justice – and takes the steps necessary to secure that result.

Last week District Attorney Katz was alerted to 20 defendants whose immediate release the defense would seek in a mass writ. Six applications for defendants with parole violations were heard in Court yesterday and our Office did not oppose releasing 4 of those defendants. Some defendant's cases were resolved with our consent or withdrawn. Today, the Office opposed the release of the remaining 8 defendants at a hearing that was presided over by Queens Supreme Court Justice Kenneth C. Holder. After a lengthy court proceeding this morning, the Court dismissed the defense petition.

Amongst the defendants who had made applications for immediate release was defendant Christopher Ransom. Ransom is being held pending trial for an alleged string of robberies that culminated in the murder of NYPD Detective Brian Simonsen, who was shot and killed when police responded to a robbery in progress at a cell phone store in Richmond Hill in February 2019. DA Katz's Office opposed Ransom's request for release and his request was denied by the Court.

Defendant Armando Santiago was also included in the mass writ that was denied by Justice Holder. Santiago, a persistent violent felon, is awaiting trial after an alleged string of home invasions beginning in June 2019 – just weeks after he had been released from prison.

Also today, a writ seeking release from custody due to the coronavirus crisis submitted on behalf of defendant Frantz Petion to the Civil Court was denied. Previous applications to the Civil Court and the Appellate Court on behalf of this defendant were also denied. Petion, an emergency medical technician, is being held on \$500,000 bond and is awaiting trial after allegedly being caught raping and choking a 10-year-old child. Following today's denial by the Civil Court, a notice of appeal has been filed on his behalf.

At the start of this outbreak, the DA's Office established protocol to evaluate Queens defendants that could be released – particularly those with underlying medical issues. To date, DA Katz has signed off on the release of some 95 defendants and did not object to roughly 150 other defendants being discharged from the Rikers Island. After careful analysis, other petitions were opposed.

Throughout this pandemic, the DA's Office has prioritized releasing individuals in the interest of justice, while also keeping in mind the safety of our communities here in Queens. Decisions are made balancing public safety issues and public health issues while also evaluating the merits of each petition. The interests of justice are best served by these thoughtful, case specific resolutions.

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