



MELINDA KATZ
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

QUEENS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568

Release #12-2020
twitter@QueensDAKatz

718.286.6000
WWW.QUEENSDA.ORG

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CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE (718) 286-6315
QDACommunications@queensda.org

LYFT DRIVER SENTENCED TO 10 YEARS IN PRISON
FOR SEXUALLY ASSAULTING FEMALE PASSENGER

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz today announced that a Lyft driver has been sentenced to 10 years in prison for sexually assaulting a 28-year-old female passenger who had fallen asleep in the defendant's vehicle during a ride to her residence in January 2018.

District Attorney Katz said, "A woman who'd called for a car, thought she would safely make it to her home. Instead, the unsuspecting woman was violated by this defendant, who was found guilty by a jury of his peers."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Welinton Fernandez, 31, of Corona, Queens. In November 2019, Fernandez was convicted at trial of criminal sexual act in the first degree and sexual abuse in the first degree before Acting Supreme Court Justice Stephanie Zaro. Justice Zaro yesterday sentenced the defendant to 10 years in prison, to be followed by 8 years' post release supervision and Fernandez is also required to register as a sex offender.

According to trial testimony, the victim met up with friends at a Flushing bar just after midnight on January 6, 2018. The young woman had worked a particularly long shift at her job and called for a Lyft to take her home. According to Lyft records, Fernandez picked up the woman at approximately 4:50 a.m. at the bar and was to take her 4 miles to her home. During the ride the victim fell asleep and was awakened by the defendant sexually assaulting her. The woman, whose pants and underwear had been pulled down, fled the vehicle and ran into her home. The following day, the police were notified and the victim was treated at a local hospital where a sexual assault forensic examiner prepared a sexual assault evidence kit. Analysis of that kit later revealed that male DNA collected from the victim's body was consistent with the defendant's DNA.

Assistant District Attorney Laura M. Dorfman, of the District Attorney's Special Victims Bureau, prosecuted the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Kenneth M. Appelbaum, Bureau Chief, Eric C. Rosenbaum and Debra Lynn Pomodore, Deputy Bureau Chiefs, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

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