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UPDATE BY QUEENS DISTRICT ATTORNEY MELINDA KATZ

ON CHANGES IN COURT PROCEEDINGS PROMPTED BY CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

In the midst of this global pandemic which has nearly paralyzed the nation and this great city, the Queens District Attorney's Office has made massive and immediate changes to ensure good health for our staff and swift justice for defendants during this unprecedented time.

The Queens District Attorney's Office has set up office workstations with access to Skype for Business, so that our Assistant District Attorneys can virtually arraign defendants without being physically present and putting their health at risk during this time. All arraignment proceedings have shifted from in-person court appearances to fully virtual appearances. The same applies to Supreme Court matters. An All Purpose Part will entertain all felony matters going forward including Supreme Court arraignments, pleas and sentencings. A second Supreme Court Part will serve as a Youth Part where Adolescent Offenders will have their cases adjourned for a 6 day review after they are arraigned.

The Queens District Attorney is not only striving to protect the health and safety of her staff members and of court personnel, but the health and safety of defendants as well. Over the past few days, a panel of nearly a dozen prosecutors, has been working tirelessly to identify defendants, who in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the interest of justice, should be released from Rikers Island. The panel is considering each defendant's age, criminal history, the remaining time left to serve of their sentence and the defendant's current health condition in reaching a determination. The panel has also reached out to the victims of the crimes committed by these defendants to consider their positions in making recommendations before presenting its findings to the District Attorney for her final decision. While the process of release is ongoing, so far the District Attorney

has determined that approximately 30 defendants should be released from Rikers Island.

At this time most of the Queens District Attorney's Office staff is working remotely, however we will always have someone available to assist those in need. A select few employees are present in the office and working diligently nearly round the clock to implement the changes that have taken place over the last week and will continue to do so throughout this state of emergency.

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