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**D.A. BROWN: QUEENS MAN CHARGED
WITH SETTING FIRES THROUGHOUT QUEENS**

18 Fires Allegedly Set Over Five-Month Period; Faces Up To 25 Years In Prison

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a 26-year-old Elmhurst man has been charged with recklessly endangering the lives of countless civilians and firefighters by setting a series of eighteen fires outside buildings and other locations in the Elmhurst, Masbeth and Rego Park sections of Queens over the last five months.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant is accused of being a serial firebug who is responsible for deliberately starting eighteen fires throughout central Queens in a relatively short period of time. His alleged actions had the potential of causing millions of dollars in property damage and the loss of an unknown number of lives. As it stands, a FDNY lieutenant suffered serious lacerations to his face when he responded to one of the fires allegedly set by the defendant. The charges are extremely serious and will be vigorously prosecuted."

District Attorney Brown identified the defendant as Kareem Jamel Walters, 26, who is a resident of a group home at 83-34 58th Avenue in Elmhurst. The defendant, who is employed as an office supply salesman at College Point Staples, has been charged with arson in the second, fourth and fifth degrees, assault in the second degree, reckless endangerment in the first degree and criminal mischief in the second and third degrees. If convicted, he faces up to 25 years in prison.

According to the District Attorney, firefighters responded to a fire early yesterday morning at an apartment complex located at 62-98 Saunders Street in Elmhurst. The apartment complex, which contains 80 apartments, suffered fire damage to the exterior of the building, including charring to the wood frame, scorching to the brick work and smoke damage. A fire captain on the scene observed the defendant in the crowd and recognized him as having been at other fires. According to the criminal complaint, when questioned, the defendant admitted to starting the Saunders Street fire by moving bags of garbage and a discarded Christmas tree from the curb to the side of the building and igniting the rubbish. Two books of matches were allegedly recovered from the defendant.

District Attorney Brown said the defendant is charged with setting a total of 18 fires between August 16, 2006 and January 19, 2007, at various locations throughout Queens – including multi-family apartment buildings – and knowingly creating a grave risk of physical injury to the occupants of the properties. In one instance, firefighters assigned to Ladder 136 responded to a fire on the evening of January 15, 2007, at 84-22 60th Road in Elmhurst. In the course of putting out the fire, a fire lieutenant suffered lacerations to his face from flying glass shards when an electric meter exploded. The lieutenant required 12 stitches above his left eye to close his wounds.

District Attorney Brown said that the defendant was arrested yesterday by fire marshals assigned to the Fire Department's Bureau of Fire Investigations. The defendant is presently being held pending arraignment later today in Queens Criminal Court in Kew Gardens.

The investigation was conducted by FDNY Captain John Abbruzzese, of Engine Company 287; Deputy Chief Fire Marshal Randy Wilson, of the Citywide Command; Deputy Chief Fire Marshal John Lynn of the Fire Marshals Special Investigations Unit; Supervising Fire Marshals Brian Grogan, Citywide Command, Phillip Gibbs, Citywide Command Squad 37, and Wendell Williams, Special Investigations Unit; and Fire Marshals Richard Grigoli, Raymond Ott, Michael Jankowski and Thomas Boyne, of the Citywide Command Squad 37 and Fire Marshal Steve Rogan of Citywide Command, and Fire Marshals Douglas Mercereau, Anthony Falconite and Daniel Caruso

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of the Special Investigations Unit. The investigation was assisted by FDNY Dispatchers and Fire Alarm Dispatcher Jeannie Williams. Also assisting in the investigation were Detective Robert Dewhurst, of the NYPD's Arson and Explosion Squad, Lieutenant Daniel Farkas of the 112th Precinct and Sergeant Joseph L. Matzinger of the 112 Precinct.

Assistant District Attorney Danielle S. Fenn of the District Attorney's Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case and the investigation was assisted by Assistant District Attorney Khadijah Muhammad-Starling, 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.

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