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**D.A. BROWN: BROOKLYN MAN ARRAIGNED ON BURGLARY
AND ASSAULT CHARGES FOLLOWING FLUSHING SCHOOL BUS CRASH**

Eight Children and Two Police Officers Among Injured; Defendant Faces Up to 25 Years In Prison

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a 43-year-old Brooklyn resident has been arraigned on charges of burglarizing a Flushing home and then leading police on a high speed chase through the streets of Queens in a stolen vehicle before colliding with a school bus, injuring ten passengers onboard and two police officers in pursuit.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant is accused of burglarizing a Flushing residence and then recklessly putting the lives of numerous pedestrians and motorists at serious risk in an effort to escape police. As it is, his alleged actions resulted in injury to nearly a dozen passengers – including a number of children – aboard a school bus and two police officers. Fortunately, no one was severely injured or killed."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Thomas Hernandez, 43, of 1094 DeKalb Avenue in Brooklyn. He was arraigned earlier today before Queens Criminal Court Judge Ira Margolis on charges of first- and second-degree burglary, first-degree reckless endangerment, second-degree assault, third-degree grand larceny, third- and fifth-degree criminal possession of stolen property, second- and fourth-degree criminal mischief, endangering the welfare of a child, resisting arrest, unauthorized use of a vehicle and driving with a suspended license. Hernandez, who faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted, was remanded and ordered to return to court on May 17, 2007.

The District Attorney said that, according to the charges, at approximately 1:45 p.m. on May 1, 2007, a New York City police officer assigned to the 101st Precinct returned home with his wife to their Flushing home to discover their grey 2005 Nissan Murano missing, their front door damaged and ajar and their home ransacked. Missing from the residence were a number of personal items, including a safe, two spare sets of car keys and an iPod. The couple immediately called 911 to report the burglary and stolen car which resulted in a description of the car being transmitted to police patrolling the area. At approximately 2:35 p.m., police assigned to the 111th Precinct observed the couple's Nissan Murano approaching the Cross Island Parkway. It is alleged that the defendant, who was driving the car, spotted the police vehicle and made a U-turn onto Northern Boulevard, jumped the curb and proceeded eastbound at a high rate of speed. Shortly thereafter, the defendant allegedly made a right turn and proceeded southbound on Douglaston Parkway, still driving at a high rate of speed, until he collided with a school bus at the intersection of Van Zandt Avenue and Burrows Avenue. The force of the impact caused the bus to flip onto its side, resulting in injury to the driver, a matron and eight children ranging in ages from eight to fourteen.

It is further charged that, after the collision, the defendant fled the scene on foot with a uniformed police officer in pursuit. The defendant then allegedly ran into a backyard and tried to climb a fence but was stopped by the pursuing officer. In the process, the officer cut his hand on the fence, sustaining a laceration requiring ten stitches.

The District Attorney said that a second police officer burned his arm on the bus muffler as he attempted to rescue the children from the overturned bus. The bus driver and the nine injured passengers were treated at a local Queens hospital and all but two of the children – who suffered pain to their leg and neck – were released.

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The investigation was conducted by Police Officer Jacqueline Diaz of the NYPD's 111th Precinct and Detective Milton Calix of the NYPD's 111th Detective Squad under the supervision of Duty Captain Christopher Tamola and Lieutenant Daniel Hefernan and the overall supervision of Inspector Scott Hannover, Commanding Officer. Assistant District Attorney Gerard F. Feeney of the District Attorney's Narcotics Trials Bureau assisted in the investigation

The District Attorney's Career Criminal Major Crimes Bureau is prosecuting the case under the supervision of James W. Evangelou, Bureau Chief, and Robert J. Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Senior Executive Assistant District Attorney for Trials James Clark Quinn and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorneys for Trials John H. Larsen and Robert Masters.

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.