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QUEENS DISTRICT ATTORNEY RICHARD A. BROWN
ESTABLISHES ANIMAL CRUELTY PROSECUTIONS UNIT
First District Attorney's Office In City To Have Dedicated Unit

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that he had created an Animal Cruelty Prosecutions Unit, which will work closely with the newly formed New York City Police Department's Animal Cruelty Investigations Squad (which assumed the ASPCA's law enforcement function in July 2014) in pursuing allegations of animal cruelty, abuse and neglect in Queens County.

"Acts of animal cruelty can range from neglect and abandonment to serious physical injury and even death and include such organized blood sports as dog and gamecock fighting which are inhumanly staged for the entertainment and gambling purposes of their spectators and in which the animals are encouraged to fight to the death," said District Attorney Brown. "Such atrocities, which studies have shown can be a precursor to crimes against people, constitute criminal activity against innocent and abused animal victims in our communities and warrant prosecution."

The District Attorney continued, "While animal cruelty cases have been aggressively prosecuted by a number of different bureaus throughout our office in the past, we recognize that the time has come for a committed and dedicated unit to better serve the people and animals of Queens County. Such criminal activity cannot be tolerated if we wish to be known as a civilized society."

The mandate of the Animal Cruelty Prosecutions Unit – the first of its kind in a District Attorney's Office in New York City – will be to investigate and prosecute animal cruelty crimes and to educate the public about how to prevent and detect abuse of animals.

In creating the Animal Cruelty Prosecutions Unit, District Attorney Brown also announced that he has appointed veteran Queens prosecutor Nicoletta J. Caferra as its inaugural chief. Ms. Caferra is a career prosecutor who has been with the Queens District Attorney's Office since 1992. Most notably, she handled the appeal of *People v. Curtis Basile*, in which the New York State Court of Appeals recently affirmed the 2007 animal mistreatment conviction of Mr. Basile who showed a complete disregard for the life of a helpless animal by failing to furnish the basic necessities required to maintain the dog's health. Since then she has been invited to speak at various prosecutorial forums across the country and has been asked to do law enforcement training nationally and to work on *amicus curiae* briefs for other prosecutors.

Other animal cruelty cases that Ms. Caferra has assisted in prosecuting include that of a Ridgewood resident who pleaded guilty to a felony charge of aggravated cruelty to animals last month for failing to properly care for or feed his dog that was emaciated, severely malnourished and

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did not have the energy to walk when brought to an animal shelter. The defendant was sentenced to a conditional discharge, with the conditions including that he be banned from owning an animal for three years and that he be required to register with the New York City Department of Health as an animal abuser.

And as in the previous case, Ms. Caferra is working with Assistant District Attorney Oscar W. Ruiz, the Deputy Chief of the District Attorney's Special Proceedings Bureau, in prosecuting a Jamaica, Queens, man on aggravated animal cruelty and other charges after he was allegedly observed kicking, punching and choking his pit bull-mix puppy over a six-week period.

District Attorney Brown said, "Niki is the ideal candidate to head up the newly created initiative. She is an accomplished appellate attorney who is extremely passionate about her work and has an extraordinary and unparalleled commitment to upholding the state's animal cruelty laws and in protecting the interests of victimized animals."

Sergeant Michael Murphy, Commanding Officer of the NYPD's Animal Cruelty Investigation Squad, said, "The Animal Cruelty Investigation Squad has an extraordinary working relationship with the Queens District Attorney's Office in regards to Animal Cruelty Investigations. With the new Animal Cruelty Prosecutions Unit created by District Attorney Brown we are looking forward to an even stronger collaboration to stop animal cruelty."

Stacy Wolf, Esq., senior vice president of the ASPCA's Anti Cruelty Group, said, "Aggressive prosecution of crimes against animals is critical to ensuring the safety of New York City residents, both human and animal. The ASPCA commends District Attorney Brown for devoting the time and resources to form a specialized Animal Cruelty Prosecutions Unit. It will undoubtedly strengthen the outstanding enforcement and animal care work already being done daily through the NYPD-ASPCA partnership and sends a strong message that crimes against animals will not be tolerated in our city."

Scott A. Heiser, Senior Attorney and Criminal Justice Program Director for the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), said, "We are so impressed with District Attorney Brown's leadership and vision. His decision to create an Animal Cruelty Prosecutions Unit in his office is sound public policy that demonstrates a genuine commitment to ensuring that justice is served for these vulnerable and voiceless victims—Queens County's abused and neglected animals. Bravo D.A. Brown."

Mr. Heiser noted that ALDF attorneys, including himself, recently had the pleasure of working with Ms. Caferra, of District Attorney Brown's office, on an appeal by an offender convicted of neglecting his dog. According to Mr. Heiser, "Niki is an absolutely inspired choice to lead this unit. She is a master orator with a brilliant legal mind. The citizens of Queens County are very lucky to have her serving them in this new capacity."

The Animal Cruelty Prosecutions Unit will operate within the District Attorney's Special Proceedings Bureau, which is supervised by Assistant District Attorney and Bureau Chief Anthony M. Communiello and Assistant District Attorney Oscar W. Ruiz, Deputy Chief, and which is under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

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