



**RICHARD A. BROWN**  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
QUEENS COUNTY  
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD  
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568  
718-286-6000**

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[www.queensda.org](http://www.queensda.org)  
[twitter@QueensDABrown](https://twitter.com/QueensDABrown)

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**CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE (718) 286-6315**  
[QDACommunications@queensda.org](mailto:QDACommunications@queensda.org)

**MARRIED COUPLE SENTENCED TO UP TO 25 YEARS IN PRISON  
ON SEX TRAFFICKING CHARGES FOR COERCING 21-YEAR-OLD WOMAN  
INTO PROSTITUTION**

*First Conviction in Queens County for Sex Trafficking as a Violent Felony Offense*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a 31-year-old Brooklyn woman and her 34-year-old husband from Pennsylvania have been sentenced on multiple counts of sex trafficking and promoting prostitution for their respective roles in an illicit sex trafficking operation they ran between October 2016 through January 2017. During this time, the defendants hired a 21-year-old woman under the false pretense that she would be working for them as an exotic dancer. Instead, the unsuspecting victim was forced to trade sex for cash and turn over all the money to the defendants. This conviction marks the first violent felony sex trafficking conviction in Queens County since the legislature increased the penalties in 2016.

District Attorney Brown said, “The victim in this case - a young woman forced into prostitution - endured both emotional and physical trauma at the hands of these two defendants. The two used physical force and intimidation to make her have sex dates with strangers and turn over the cash to them. They have both been convicted and will serve a lengthy term in prison for their predatory actions.”

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Elizabeth O’Sullivan, 31, of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and Lee Vargas, 34, of Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. Both defendants were convicted last October following a five-week-long jury trial of three counts of sex trafficking and second- and third-degree promoting prostitution before Acting Queens Supreme Court Justice Peter Vallone Jr. Justice Vallone sentenced them to an indeterminate term of 8 1/3 to 25 years on the two non-violent sex trafficking charges and a determinate term of 17 years on the violent sex trafficking charge.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to trial testimony, in October 2016, the two defendants picked up the 21-year-old victim from an undisclosed location in Massachusetts and drove the woman to Queens. The victim was under the impression that the pair hired her to be an exotic dancer and stripper. Instead, the married pair forced the victim to have daily sexual encounters with multiple men in exchange for money. The victim was then forced to turn over the cash to the defendants.

Continuing, the District Attorney said, the defendants advertised the woman, along with several other females, as being a prostitute on Backpage.com. When the 21-year-old could no longer stand the brutal treatment she endured, she cried and told the defendants she did not want to work for them. Defendant Vargas ordered the young woman to call him “Daddy.” He slapped her

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repeatedly, choked and threw her to the floor her when she overslept and missed scheduled dates with her clients. Defendant Vargas further humiliated the young woman by urinating on her to signify that she belonged to him.

The District Attorney continued, according to trial testimony, the victim tried to leave the Flushing hotel where she was held on numerous occasions only to be met at the door by O'Sullivan, who physically attacked and forced her to remain inside the room.

In an act of desperation, the District Attorney said, according to trial records, the victim managed to reach out to her family, who notified police. An undercover rescue operation began on January 7, 2017, when a law enforcement official responded to one of the advertisements. The officer, who was summoned to the Main Street location, met the victim and agreed to engage in sexual intercourse in exchange for \$200. At approximately 4:00 a.m., the following morning, officers returned to the hotel and apprehended the defendants as they were sitting in a vehicle outside of the hotel smoking.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Rose Muckenthaler, of the joint New York City Police Department / Federal Bureau of Investigations Human Trafficking Task force under the supervision of Lt. Joseph Picarello, she initially began investigation the case while assigned to the New York City Police Department's Major Case Vice Enforcement Division's Human Trafficking Team, under the supervision of Lieutenant Christopher Sharpe, and Captain Thomas Milano, and by Detective Irene Bonica-Delgado, of the New York City Police Department's Queens Vice Enforcement Division, which is under the supervision of Sergeant Robert Duplessis and Lieutenant Roger Reid and under the overall supervision of Inspector James P. Klein.

Assistant District Attorneys Jessica Melton, Unit Chief of the District Attorney's Human Trafficking Unit, and Sophia Williams prosecuted the case, with the assistance of detectives from District Attorney's Detective Bureau under the supervision of Chief Franco Russo and Paralegals Kate J. Hall and Rosa Marie Cipriano, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Anthony M. Communiello, Chief of the Special Proceedings Bureau which oversees the Human Trafficking Unit, Nicoletta J. Caferra and Oscar W. Ruiz, Deputy Bureau Chiefs of the Special Proceedings Bureau, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Assistant Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Wilbert J. LeMelle.

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**Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted on [www.queensda.org](http://www.queensda.org)**