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QUEENS MAN INDICTED ON HATE CRIME CHARGES FOR LABOR DAY STABBING DEATH

*Defendant Allegedly Used Homophobic Slur Just Before Knife Attack;
Accused Faces Up to 25 Years to Life in Prison if Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that a Queens County grand jury has indicted James Williams, 51, on murder as a hate crime and other charges for allegedly stabbing to death a 20-year-old Brooklyn man on Labor Day. The defendant is accused of using a homophobic slur before plunging a knife into the victim's chest.

District Attorney Katz said, "The defendant's own words allegedly reveal that his bigoted perceptions sparked this deadly attack. Violence is never an acceptable option, but violence spurred by hate and prejudice is uniquely abhorrent and will always be prosecuted by this office to the fullest extent of the law."

Williams, of New Haven Avenue in Far Rockaway, is scheduled to be arraigned this coming Tuesday, September 29th before Queens Supreme Court Justice Richard Buchter on a five-count indictment. The defendant is charged with murder in the second degree as a hate crime, murder in the second degree, criminal possession of a weapon in the third and fourth degree and tampering with evidence. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

According to the charges, on the afternoon of September 7, 2020, the defendant and Massiah Berkley sat on the same bench on a pathway off Beach 20th Street in Far Rockaway, Queens. The defendant allegedly called the victim a "f--t," which led to a confrontation that ended with Williams allegedly pulling out a knife and stabbing the 20-year-old victim in the chest and in the back of the head.

According to the charges, police responding to reports of a fight shortly after 3:55 p.m. found the Brownsville, Brooklyn man lying face up and bleeding from his chest. Mr. Berkley was rushed to a nearby hospital, but died from the injuries.

DA Katz said the defendant was apprehended near the scene a short time after the attack.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Drew Solomon of the New York City Police Department's 101st Precinct Detective Squad and the Queens Homicide North Detective Squad.

Senior Assistant District Attorney Jonathan Selkove, with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Rosanne Howell, of the District Attorney's Homicide Bureau, will be prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Brad A. Leventhal, Bureau Chief, Peter J. McCormack III, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, John W. Kosinski and Kenneth A. Appelbaum, Deputy Bureau Chiefs and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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