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QUEENS MAN BUSTED FOR BOGUS UNION MEMBERSHIP CASH CON

*Defendant Allegedly Offered Union Entry in Exchange for Thousands of Dollars;
Nine People Scammed into Forking Over Roughly \$12,500;
Accused Faces Up to Four Years in Prison If Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that Jofre Ortega, 54, has been charged with grand larceny and other crimes for allegedly conning people eager to join the Mason Tenders Local 79 Union that he offered memberships for cash – even though he did not have the authority to do so.

District Attorney Katz said, “The defendant in this case is accused of taking advantage of his position as a union member and knowledge of Local 79 to line his pockets. More than a dozen individuals – laborers who sought to earn better pay for their hard work – were allegedly conned by this defendant into giving him cash for entry into the Mason Tenders union. I want to thank the union’s leadership for bringing this case to our attention. The defendant is now charged with serious crimes for taking advantage of others to feed his own greed.”

Mason Tenders District Council Business Manager Robert Bonanza said, “Local 79’s collective bargaining agreements are written to put the rewards of a hard day’s work in the hands of the construction laborers who build our City from the ground up. The heinous conduct described in today’s criminal complaint endangers the availability and creation of middle-class union construction jobs. Simply put, it is wrong and illegal for anyone outside of Local 79 to be involved in the distribution of the union’s memberships, let alone personally profiting off the opportunities they engender. We applaud DA Katz for bringing this case and in so doing protecting the good-paying construction jobs the union has fought so hard to create.”

Ortega, of Grattan Street in Brooklyn, was arraigned before Queens Criminal Court Judge Diego Freire on a complaint charging him with grand larceny in the fourth degree, petit larceny and scheme to defraud in the second degree. Judge Freire ordered the defendant to return to Court on May 3, 2022. Ortega faces between 1 1/3 to 4 years in prison, if convicted.

According to the charges, between September 2019 and March 2021, the defendant allegedly promised at least nine individuals that he could get them into the Mason Tenders Local 79 Union – but only if they paid him between \$500 and \$1,500 each.

DA Katz said many of the victims spoke to the defendant about their desire to join the union. Ortega allegedly told each one of them that he could secure membership for them at a cost. Some of the victims, both

men and women, met with the defendant at a home on 107th Street in Corona, Queens. There, the defendant allegedly collected \$1,500 from each of the victims.

Even though the defendant is a member of the Labor 79 Union, he is not authorized to grant membership to anyone.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Thomas Kaup, Isabella Frias, Maxwell Runes, Michael Ambrosino, under the supervision of Sergeant Richard Lewis and Lieutenant Steven Brown, of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Aharon Diaz, of the District Attorney's Frauds Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Joseph Conley, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard Brave.

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

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