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DA KATZ SECURES GUILTY PLEA AND RESTITUTION
IN UNION MEMBERSHIP CASH CON

*Defendant Offered Union Entry in Exchange for Cash;
14 People Scammed into Paying Roughly \$18,000 Directly to Defendant*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Jofre Ortega pleaded guilty today to grand larceny and other crimes for conning people eager to join the Mason Tenders Local 79 Union by offering memberships for cash. As part of the plea, the defendant is required to pay restitution in the amount of \$18,000 to the 14 victims. At the behest of the District Attorney, Local 79 held an informational session for victims and their families on legitimate ways to join the union.

District Attorney Katz said: “More than a dozen individuals – laborers who sought to earn better pay for their hard work – were conned by this defendant, who took advantage of his position to line his pockets. I want to thank the union’s leadership for bringing this case to our attention and helping my Office hold the defendant accountable.”

Ortega, 58, of Grattan Street in Brooklyn, pleaded guilty today before Queens Criminal Court Judge Jerry Iannece to grand larceny in the fourth degree and petit larceny. As a condition of the plea agreement, Ortega is required to pay back the money he pocketed from 14 victims who thought they were paying for a union membership. Judge Iannece ordered the defendant back to Court on February 21, 2023.

According to the original charges, between September 2019 and March 2021, the defendant 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. Some of the victims, both men and women, met with the defendant at various locations throughout Queens County, where the defendant collected the funds from each of the victims.

Since the launch of the investigation, and the subsequent prosecution of this case, an additional five victims have come forward to report being scammed by the defendant, bringing the total number of complainants to 14 individuals.

Ortega was never authorized to grant union memberships to any of the victims.

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, and

under the overall supervision of Chief Investigator Thomas Conforti of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau.

Senior Assistant District Attorney Aharon Diaz of the District Attorney's Frauds Bureau is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Hana C. Kim, Deputy Bureau Chief, Assistant District Attorney Joseph T. Conley III, Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard Brave.

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Note to Editors: Archived press releases are available at www.queensda.org.

