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DEFENDANTS CHARGED WITH ANTI-ASIAN ATTACK IN CORONA

Faces Up to 4 Years in Prison if Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Elijah Fernandez and Natalie Plaza are charged with assault as a hate crime for their alleged involvement in a hate-motivated assault in Corona on a woman and two men who attempted to stop the attack.

District Attorney Katz said: “In the most diverse county in the country, perhaps the most diverse place in the world, there is zero tolerance for hate. We will not allow our values to be threatened with violence.”

Fernandez, 21, of Ozone Park, and Plaza, 18, of Richmond Hill, were arraigned last night on a criminal complaint charging both with assault in the third degree as a hate crime and aggravated harassment in the second degree. Fernandez was additionally charged on a five-count complaint with assault in the third degree as a hate crime, menacing in the second degree as a hate crime, assault in the third degree, aggravated harassment in the second degree and harassment in the second degree in connection with the incident. Fernandez and Plaza face up to 4 years in prison, if convicted. Judge Jessica Earle-Gargan ordered the defendants to return to court on March 10.

According to the charges, at approximately 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 2, the 44-year-old female victim and her 24-year-old son were on Junction Boulevard near Roosevelt Avenue in Corona when a white Acura SUV drove by with defendant Plaza in the front passenger seat. Plaza yelled “Ugly Asian!” and threw water from the car window onto the woman.

The charges further state that the SUV stopped and Plaza got out, approached the female victim and pulled her to the ground. Plaza then punched and kicked the woman multiple times in the face and upper body. A 44-year-old male bystander approached to help the victim, at which time Fernandez and another male who has yet to be arrested got out of the SUV and rushed toward the Good Samaritan.

As the Good Samaritan attempted to pull Plaza away from the prone female victim, Fernandez and his male associate punched him in the face. The female victim’s 24-year-old son approached to help his mother and was also punched in the face by Fernandez. The three assailants then got back into the SUV, with Fernandez behind the wheel. Before leaving the scene, the SUV swerved and came within inches of the female victim.

The female victim and her son were taken to a local hospital for treatment of their injuries.

The investigation was conducted by Detective John Walters of the NYPD Hate Crimes Task Force.

Assistant District Attorney Michael Brovner, Bureau Chief of the District Attorney's Hate Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for the Major Crimes Division Shawn Clark.

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

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