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## **LONG ISLAND MAN INDICTED ON SEX TRAFFICKING CHARGES**

*Faces Up to 50 Years in Prison*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Cleveland Sterling was arraigned on charges of sex trafficking, robbery and other crimes for allegedly forcing two victims to engage in prostitution and assaulting and robbing them.

District Attorney Katz said: “Traffickers use violence, intimidation and claims of financial debt to force victims into sex work. We are determined to prosecute these predators and get victims the resources they need to get their lives back.”

Sterling, 34, of Arcadia Avenue in Uniondale, was arraigned on a 21-count indictment charging him with sex trafficking, promoting prostitution in the second and third degrees, robbery in the second and third degrees, grand larceny in the fourth degree, assault in the third degree, petit larceny and criminal mischief in the fourth degree. Justice Peter Vallone, Jr. ordered Sterling to return to court March 31. If convicted, he faces up to 50 years in prison.

According to the charges:

- Sterling met the first victim, a 19-year-old woman, in 2016 and on multiple occasions through November 2022 forced her to engage in sex for money at various locations around Queens. Sterling took photographs of the victim and used them to create online ads for sex. He communicated with customers, arranged prostitution dates and collected and required the victim to turn over to him all payments for the sexual encounters. Sterling struck the victim if she withheld cash from him. On an occasion when the victim told Sterling she did not want to have sex with customers for money, he punched her in the face and body—bruising her face and breaking some of her teeth.
- On April 9, 2022, at the Van Wyck Hotel on Liberty Avenue, while defendant was forcing her to engage in acts of prostitution Sterling pushed the victim down the stairs, causing injury to her ankle and breaking her cellphone. During another incident, on November 25, 2022, Sterling entered the victim’s room at the Hotel JFK located at 139-09 Archer Avenue, struck her about her body and pulled a chain from her neck.

Sterling met a second victim, a 19-year-old woman, in August 2021.

According to the charges:

- He compelled her to engage in sexual activities with men at various locations for money. Sterling took photographs of the victim that he used in online ads for sex acts and arranged prostitution dates for which he collected the proceeds. On multiple occasions, when the victim refused to engage in sex acts, Sterling struck and bit her. To intimidate her, he sent her photos and video of him physically abusing the first victim to show what the consequences would be if she did not comply with his demands to engage in prostitution acts.
- On approximately October 15, 2021, at a hotel on Archer Avenue, Sterling punched the second victim in her face causing substantial pain to her jaw. During another incident, on October 19, 2021, at the LeTap Hotel on 139-01 Archer Avenue, Sterling struck the second victim about her body and took a sum of united states currency, proceeds from the prostitution acts, from her.
- During the course of the victims being trafficked, they each received tattoos bearing a form of the defendant's name that was used to threaten them. The first victim was threatened that if she wanted to leave Sterling, she would first have to cut off her own foot because his name was tattooed on it so her foot belonged to him. The second victim who believed she was getting a different tattoo, was tattooed with Sterling's street name after which he told her that she was now his property.

The arrest related to the incidents in 2022 was conducted by the Police Officer Nicholas Difrancio with the assistance of Police Officer Christopher Messina of the New York City Police Department's 103 Precinct, under the supervision of Sergeant Cassandra Matthews, Sergeant Michael Callaghan and Lieutenant Stephen Faber.

The 2021 arrest was conducted by the Police Officer Joseph Hughes with the assistance of Police Officer Matthew Fallon of the New York City Police Department's 103 Precinct, under the supervision of Sergeant Dominick Perfetto.

The investigations were conducted by Detective Craig Ryan, New York City Police Department's Queens Vice enforcement Module, under the supervision of Lieutenant Stephen Conforti, Captain Stanislav Levitsky and Assistant Chief Joseph Kenny.

Assistant District Attorney Marina Arshakyan of the District Attorney's Human Trafficking Bureau is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Jessica Melton, Bureau Chief, Tara DiGregorio, Deputy Bureau Chief and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard A. Brave.

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

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