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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
TUESDAY, MAY 9, 2023

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**DISTRICT ATTORNEY KATZ, NYPD ANNOUNCE EXPANSION  
OF BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TO ASTORIA**

*Rollout Follows Successful Program Launches in Jamaica and Flushing*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz, together with NYPD officials and members of the western Queens business community, today announced the launch of the Astoria Merchants Business Improvement Program, designed to enhance safety in and around local shops. The program focuses on the small number of individuals responsible for the vast majority of the harm done to local businesses and the communities they serve. The disruptive behavior will usually consist of repeated shoplifting, as well as harassing and even threatening customers and store staff. In many instances, the disruptions have gone on for years.

Through the program, a participating business contacts the local precinct when such an individual is disrupting business. The responding officers can issue a trespass notice and warn the individual that their continued presence, or return to the location, could result in their arrest. Since the program's launch in the Jamaica business district two years ago, 23 trespass notices have been issued; three arrests have been made. Retailers have said the program has made a difference.

District Attorney Katz said: "We need to address the few responsible for the vast majority of the shoplifting and vandalism and for it to stop. Our goal is to protect local businesses, many of them mom-and-pop shops, and the customers and communities depending on them. We should never lose sight of the fact that communities thrive when local businesses thrive."

Deputy Inspector Kenneth S. Gorman, Commanding Officer of the 114<sup>th</sup> Precinct, said: "This successful, expanding program perfectly highlights the NYPD's unwavering commitment to ensure public safety for all the New Yorkers we serve. We heard from the businesses in Western Queens, and we listened – because we know that public safety is a shared responsibility between our communities and their police. I commend and thank our local merchants, the officers of the 114<sup>th</sup> Precinct, District Attorney Katz, and all of our partners involved in this important initiative to further reduce crime and improve quality of life in our great city."

Marie Torniali, Executive Director of the Steinway Astoria Partnership, said: "This a great tool for our small businesses who are many times alone in their establishment and fearful of individuals who habitually enter with the sole purpose of causing harm or chaos. This is not about instant arrest; it is a warning to those individuals not to return. Our merchants will be able to breathe a sigh of relief and continue running their business and assist customers without apprehension."

Plinia Sarchese, President, and Rudy Sarchese, President Emeritus, of the Astoria Homeowners, Tenants & Business Civic Association said: "The law-abiding citizens of Queens have put up with disturbing

anti-social behavior in stores for too long. Shopkeepers and consumers shouldn't have to shoulder the losses from repeat shoplifters who flout the law without serious consequences. The Astoria Homeowners, Tenants & Business Civic Association commends the creative effort by the Queens DA's Office and NYPD to incapacitate repeat offenders within the bounds of New York law. It will help shops stay in business and prevent potentially dangerous escalations. We look forward to helping local establishments participate in the valuable program.”

Merchants can enroll in the Astoria program through the 114th Precinct.

The District Attorney’s office created the program in partnership with the NYPD and the Jamaica business community in June 2021 to ensure that the community felt safe patronizing local businesses hit hard by the pandemic.

A total of 25 stores, from mom-and-pop shops to large chain retailers, currently participate in the initiative through the 103<sup>rd</sup> Precinct in Jamaica.

Since the expansion of the program into Flushing in April, 39 businesses have signed up through the 109<sup>th</sup> Precinct.

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