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DISTRICT ATTORNEY KATZ CHARGES OPERATORS
OF UNLICENSED MOBILE CANNABIS DISPENSARIES IN ASTORIA AND OZONE PARK
Vehicles Impounded and Products Seized

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced the takedown of three illegal cannabis operations resulting in the arrest of five individuals who were charged in connection with their roles in allegedly operating illegal mobile marijuana dispensaries from two trucks in Astoria, and an illegal smoke shop in Ozone Park located directly across the street from a middle school.

District Attorney Katz said: “Unlicensed sellers are undercutting legal vendors as they are just getting started, denying badly needed tax revenues for essential public services. The illegal outlets also are the focus of numerous community complaints, including for selling hallucinogens and edible marijuana products that have sickened young people and are marketed to children. I congratulate my team for their outstanding work and thank our partners at the New York City Sheriff’s office, NYPD and DEA for their unwavering commitment to protect and serve.”

New York City Sherriff Anthony Miranda said: “We appreciate the efforts of Queens District Attorney Katz and her staff in continuing to fight against the unlicensed and unregulated cannabis industry. The sale of unregulated products is a health and safety threat to our communities. The sale of cannabis in New York is only legal when sold from licensed dispensaries, all other sales are illegal. My office will continue to work with all of our law enforcement partners to rid the city of the illegal operations.”

NYPD Commissioner Keechant L. Sewell said: “The New York City Police Department is steadfast in our commitment to rid the city’s streets of unlicensed, illegal businesses that pose significant public safety problems in our communities. By working in close partnership with the New York City Sheriff’s Office, the Queens District Attorney, and all of our city and state partners, NYPD officers will continue to use every resource available to protect New Yorkers and to ensure that the new cannabis regulations are properly recognized, accepted, and enforced.”

United States Drug Enforcement Administration New York Division Special Agent in Charge Frank Tarentino said: “DEA sees drug traffickers disguise edible drugs to look like candy that often get into the wrong hands causing toxic reactions. This case is one example of how DEA continues to enforce drug laws in order to safeguard our communities from overdoses and poisonings. I commend the work of our partners at the NYC Sheriff’s Office, NYPD, and Queens District Attorney’s Office.”

Currently, there are nine licensed adult recreational-use cannabis dispensaries open in New York state, including one in Jamaica. There are 40 state-authorized medical marijuana dispensaries, including three in Queens.

Lara Paola, 32, of 70th Street in Jackson Heights, Tanik Kerr, 42, of Kane Avenue in Hempstead and Edgar Niyazov, 30, of Queens Boulevard in Rego Park were each charged yesterday with criminal possession of cannabis in the third degree, unlawful sale of cannabis, and unlicensed general vending. The defendants each face up to 364 days in jail if convicted.

According to the charges, Paola operated an unlicensed mobile cannabis dispensary called “All The Smoke,” on the corner of 30th Avenue and 33rd Street in Astoria. Kerr and Niyazov operated an unlicensed mobile cannabis dispensary called “Canna Depot,” on the corner of Broadway and 34th Street in Astoria.

During the investigation, undercover detectives from District Attorney Katz’s office made numerous controlled purchases of cannabis from each of the trucks on multiple occasions.

On May 3, detectives from the District Attorney’s office, along with NYPD officers, executed search warrants at each of the mobile dispensaries.

The following was recovered from the trucks, which were impounded:

- More than five pounds of cannabis flower, including hundreds of pre-rolled joints, blunts, resin, and oil
- Hundreds of packages of edible cannabis, such as gummies and candy bars in packaging resembling common consumer candy and snack products with names such as “Nerdz,” “Sno Capz,” “Wonka Bars,” and “Trolli”
- Dozens of cannabis vape “pens”

Additionally, Nasser Gamil, 44, of 101st Avenue in Ozone Park and Abdulwahab Alabi, 32, of Liberty Avenue in Ozone Park were charged with criminal possession of cannabis in the first degree and criminal possession of a controlled substance in the fifth degree. If convicted, the defendants each face up to two and half years in prison.

According to the charges, Gamil and Alabi sold cannabis and controlled substances from inside the 101 Deli and Grocery at 92-15 101st Avenue in Ozone Park, less than 200 feet from MS 210, the Elizabeth Blackwell Middle School.

During a joint operation with the DEA, undercover investigators conducted a controlled delivery to the defendants at the 101 Deli and Grocery of a shipping pallet containing cannabis and controlled substances from Los Angeles.

The following was seized:

- More than 28 lbs. of cannabis flower
- More than six pounds of individually packaged edible psilocybin, a hallucinogen also known as “magic mushrooms”

- More than 1,600 individually wrapped pre-rolled cannabis joints
- Dozens of boxes of edible cannabis gummies

These operations were part of District Attorney Katz’s ongoing efforts to rid Queens of illegal cannabis dispensaries, whether operating out of trucks and vans or brick-and-mortar commercial locations.

Since November, enforcement operations have resulted in the prosecution of 55 individuals for charges related to the sale and/or possession of cannabis or controlled substances in Queens.

In December, an undercover operation led to the seizure of the “Beach Boyz Buds” truck, an illegal mobile cannabis dispensary operating in Rockaway Park across from the Rockaway Ferry Dock and less than two blocks from nearby schools.

In April, District Attorney Katz charged four men in connection with the operation of Smoke Base, an illegal cannabis shop in College Point. An undercover investigation into the shop was sparked by five teens becoming sick from an edible marijuana product allegedly purchased at the store.

To date, the following items, with an estimated combined value of more than \$3 million, have been seized from more than 40 suspected illegal cannabis dispensaries:

- More than 550 pounds of cannabis edibles, including gummies and candy bars
- More than 500 pounds of cannabis flowers
- More than 7,800 cannabis vape “pens”
- Hundreds of boxes of untaxed cigarettes
- Dozens of packages of edible psilocybin

The district attorney’s office has also put landlords on notice that they must commence eviction proceedings of commercial tenants who are engaged in an illegal trade or business. If the landlord fails to do so, District Attorney Katz will use her civil authority pursuant to the Real Property Actions and Proceedings Law to take over such eviction proceedings, if necessary.

On April 14, District Attorney Katz sent a letter to the proprietors of 315 suspected illegal cannabis dispensaries located in commercial spaces throughout Queens, notifying them that she intends to use the Real Property law where necessary, and to pursue criminal charges, including tax evasion, money laundering, and unlawful sale or possession of cannabis and untaxed cigarettes, where appropriate.

Assisting in the most recent investigations were members of the New York City Sheriff’s Office, NYPD and DEA.

The investigation into the unlicensed mobile cannabis dispensaries in Astoria was conducted by Assistant District Attorney Shanon LaCorte, Unit Director of the District Attorney’s Crime Strategies and Intelligence Unit,

with assistance from Supervising Intelligence Analyst Jennifer Rudy, along with members of the Queens District Attorney's Detective Bureau under the supervision of Sergeant Joseph Oliver, Sergeant William Abatangelo, and Lieutenant Janet Helgeson, and under the overall supervision of the Chief of Detectives Thomas Conforti.

Assistant District Attorney Kieran Linehan, Supervisor, Major Narcotics in the Major Economic Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Mary Lowenburg, Bureau Chief, Assistant District Attorney Catherine Kane, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, Assistant District Attorney Jonathan Scharf, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of Investigations Gerard Brave.

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

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