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**DISTRICT ATTORNEY KATZ ANNOUNCES PILOT INITIATIVE  
TO FIGHT RETAIL THEFT WILL EXPAND ACROSS QUEENS**

*Program's Success in Jamaica, Flushing and Astoria Leads to Expansion*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz and the NYPD announced the borough-wide expansion of the Merchants Business Improvement Program, an initiative to combat repeat shoplifting and the harassment and threatening of customers and store staff by the handful of individuals responsible for many of the disruptions to local businesses. Piloted in Jamaica, Flushing and Astoria, the program enhances safety for retailers and their customers and employees.

District Attorney Katz said: "The feedback from the merchants in the pilot programs has been very positive. With the high rate of retail theft we are seeing throughout the city, it is absolutely essential that we keep fighting back. Expanding this program across the borough is an important part of that fight. We are not going to allow a small group of individuals to terrorize shop keepers, their employees and customers and to disrupt our local economy. We will not allow that to happen, because when our local businesses thrive, our communities thrive."

Assistant Chief Kevin Williams, Commanding Officer of Patrol Borough Queens South, said: "The NYPD welcomes the expansion of this innovative program, which reinforces the deep collaboration between the Police Department and the office of Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz. It's an initiative that activates the best of our intelligence-driven policing strategies to further reduce crime and improve the quality of life for all who live in, work in, and visit the great borough of Queens."

Participating businesses contact police when an individual engages in disruptive, dangerous or illegal behavior in their establishment. The responding officers can issue a trespass notice and warn the individual that their return to the location could result in their arrest. A total of 142 business locations, from mom-and-pop shops to large chain retailers, participate in the program in the three pilot precincts. Trespass affidavits have been served to 83 individuals, five of whom were arrested for violating the notices.

Mee Mee Xie, owner of Wong Nutrition in Flushing, said: "Before the start of this program, individuals would come inside my store to steal items from the counter, including iPads. They even broke the front glass one time. Since I enrolled in the program and have been working with the police and the Queens DA's office, my store has been much safer, and I have not experienced another incident. This is a great program to help store owners and their employees, to make sure that we have an added layer of protection against criminal behavior and can continue to serve our customers in peace."

Robert Battipaglia, owner of Grand Wine & Liquor in Astoria, said: “This is a helpful tool that makes the store owners like myself feel less helpless and know that we have a way of protecting ourselves. As a wine and liquor store owner, I am a magnet for shoplifting. The DA’s office and the police have been very helpful in trying to combat this trend. I am a proud member of the Merchants Business Improvement Program and appreciate DA Katz’ commitment to the safety of local business owners.”

The program will now expand beyond the 103rd, 114th and 109th precincts to every precinct in Queens. Businesses interested in participating can enroll in the program by contacting their local Precinct’s Neighborhood Coordination Officers.

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.

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