



718.286.6000
WWW.QUEENSDA.ORG

QUEENS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568

Release 147-2023
twitter@QueensDAKatz



MELINDA KATZ
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2023

CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE (718) 286-6315
QDACommunications@queensda.org

MAN CHARGED WITH ASSAULT FOR BITING OFF POLICE OFFICER'S FINGERTIP

Faces up to 25 Years in Prison

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Lenni Rodriguez Cruz was arraigned today, accused of leading police on an extended high-speed car chase through a public park and 20 red lights, as well as injuring a motorist and a police officer whose fingertip he is alleged to have bitten off.

District Attorney Katz said: "The rule of law, and the officers who enforce it, will be respected. The defendant is accused of recklessly putting countless lives at grave risk, injuring a motorist and causing a grievous permanent injury to a police officer. The dangerous lawlessness seen here simply will not be tolerated or excused."

Rodriguez Cruz, 28, of Rutland Road in Brooklyn, was arraigned on a 15-count indictment charging him with two counts of assault in the first degree; assault in the second degree; assault on a peace or police officer, fireman or emergency medical services professional; reckless endangerment in the first degree; obstructing governmental administration in the second degree; unlawful fleeing a police officer in a motor vehicle in the third degree; two counts of operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol; operating a motor vehicle while impaired by the combined use of drugs or of alcohol and drugs; reckless driving; operating a motor vehicle without wearing a safety belt; operating or driving a motor vehicle with improper license plates; operating or driving a motor vehicle without a license; leaving the scene of an incident without reporting.

If convicted, Rodriguez Cruz faces up to 25 years in prison. Supreme Court Justice Toni Cimino ordered him to return to court on November 15.

According to the charges:

- On September 20, at approximately 11:40 p.m., Rodriguez Cruz was observed by a police officer at the intersection of Liberty Avenue and Merrick Boulevard to be driving a blue 2009 Nissan Altima without wearing a seatbelt. When the officer, who was in full uniform and driving a marked police vehicle, found that the Nissan's license plate was not registered to the vehicle, he turned on his lights and siren and attempted to get Rodriguez Cruz to pull over.
- Rodriguez Cruz sped off, mounted a sidewalk and drove through Rufus King Park at 150th Street and Jamaica Avenue, scattering parkgoers who ran to safety.
- The defendant proceeded to drive the wrong way into oncoming traffic on Sutphin Boulevard and struck an occupied vehicle. He then entered the Grand Central Parkway, hit two vehicles and continued driving. The driver of one of the cars Rodriguez Cruz struck on the Grand Central Parkway needed to be treated at a local hospital for multiple injuries.
- Rodriguez Cruz continued onto the Grand Central Parkway service road, where he slammed into an unmarked police vehicle that was part of a barricade set up to stop him. The three officers who had been inside the police car were able to jump out just before impact.
- When officers pulled Rodriguez Cruz out of his crashed car, he had bloodshot, watery eyes, slurred his speech and his breath smelled of alcohol. A clear plastic cup containing an alcoholic beverage was discovered inside his car.
- In evading police, Rodriguez Cruz failed to stop at approximately 20 steady red lights.
- Rodriguez Cruz was taken to the 103rd police precinct, where he struck, and spit on, a sergeant attempting to place him in a holding cell. He then bit off the tip of the officer's left ring finger.

- The sergeant required stitches and a revision amputation, leaving the officer without the use of his finger down to his first knuckle.
- Rodriguez Cruz was unable to provide a valid driver's license, nor was there a record of him holding one.

Assistant District Attorney Samantha Tighe, of the District Attorney's Felony Trial Bureau III, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Rachel Buchter, Bureau Chief, Peter Lomp and Christine McCoy, Deputy Chiefs and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of the Trials Division Pishoy B. Yacoub.

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

#

Note to Editors: Archived press releases are available at www.queensda.org.

