



MELINDA KATZ DISTRICT ATTORNEY

FOR THE DA'S WEEKLY EBLAST,
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A Message from District Attorney

MELINDA KATZ

WELCOME CHANGES TO DISCOVERY

It was my honor to join Governor Kathy Hochul as she announced an agreement with State Legislative leaders to make essential changes to existing discovery laws.

The 2019 changes to discovery – the requirement that prosecutors share evidence with defense attorneys in a timely manner – were the right thing to do, but there have been unintended consequences: cases are taking longer, dismissals have increased, and victims are being harmed.

Working with my fellow district attorneys, we presented our state leaders with a trove of data that showed that our discovery laws needed to be updated.

These negotiated changes to the discovery statute will help preserve the rights of the accused, improve public safety and protect victims.

I thank Governor Hochul, Assembly Speaker Carle Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for finding common ground on New York's discovery laws.

Our state has the most transparent discovery laws in the United States and these changes will safeguard that designation.

In Friendship,

Melinda Katz

AUTO THEFT CREW OPERATING IN TRI-STATE AREA BUSTED

A prolific car theft ring was dismantled, and 20 individuals were indicted on various charges including enterprise corruption, grand larceny and criminal possession of stolen property last month.

This crew allegedly stole more than \$4.6 million worth of cars and motorcycles – including BMWs, Hondas, Mercedes-Benzes and Land Rovers – throughout the New York City area and beyond.

The arrests were the result of a three-year investigation by the DA's office, the NYPD and the New York State Police and included undercover operatives who were able to buy 44 of the 126 cars that had been stolen.

Many of the stolen vehicles were swiped from city streets, while others were taken from the driveways of car owners – sometimes unlocked with the keys or key fobs inside.

The theft crew also used high-tech methods to steal cars, including using a handheld device to access the car's diagnostics system, which enabled them to program new key fobs to drive the cars away.

After stealing the cars, the crew allegedly disabled vehicle navigation systems and were adept at disposing of any tracking devices that rightful owners placed in their vehicles.

The cars were then sold to brokers who allegedly advertised the stolen vehicles on social media, including Instagram and Facebook. The defendants quickly flipped cars without altering the vehicle identification numbers.

In addition to the cars, undercover investigators also bought three firearms from the alleged culprits, including a semi-automatic rifle.

DA Katz said that her office, along with law enforcement partners, will methodically investigate, prosecute and dismantle auto theft rings operating in Queens County.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR VEHICLE

- 1. Get a Car Diagnostic Port Lock:** This is a special lock that will block access to the diagnostic port that is used when you get your car serviced. Savvy criminals use this port to program new key fobs and drive away with your vehicle. A port lock will slow down and dissuade car thieves.
- 2. Use a traditional anti-theft device:** Remember the steering wheel bars? They are still excellent deterrents. They're easily visible to would-be thieves and require a great deal of effort and time to disengage.
- 3. Lock your car:** Remember to never leave your key or key fob in the car. Never leave the vehicle's engine running, even if you expect to be away for mere seconds.

JUSTICE FOR CAPTAIN ALISON RUSSO



Defendant Peter Zisopoulos was convicted this past month of the senseless September 2022 murder of FDNY EMS Lieutenant Alison Russo.

The victim was walking down the street, just a few hundred feet from her EMS base in Astoria, when the defendant ran out of his apartment building and stabbed the 61-year-old 20 times in the chest and abdomen in an unprovoked assault.

A good Samaritan tried to intervene during the assault, but the defendant chased him off with a knife. A shop owner followed the defendant back to his home and then ran to the nearby EMS base to get help for Russo.

Despite the extraordinary intervention of her EMS colleagues and emergency room doctors, Russo was pronounced dead shortly after the stabbing.

"Alison Russo was a long-time public servant who cared deeply for the people of New York. Our city is still mourning for a woman who saved countless lives as a member of the FDNY EMS and as a volunteer with her local ambulance company in Long Island," said DA Katz. "I hope this conviction brings Alison's family, friends and co-workers solace as we continue to grieve her loss."

Following a week-long jury trial, Zisopoulos was convicted of murder in the second degree and criminal possession of a weapon in the fourth degree. The jury deliberated for approximately one hour and the defendant now faces up to 25 years to life in prison when he is sentenced.

Lt. Alison Russo was a beloved member of the FDNY EMS team. She was a leader who served the people of New York City for 24 years and worked at the World Trade Center in the aftermath of the terror attacks on September 11, 2001.

Russo was posthumously promoted to captain by the FDNY.

CASES OF INTEREST

A Maryland man was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison for the killing of his children's grandfather. **Sheldon Dottin**, 51, wore a mask and hat before entering the victim's Springfield Gardens home in April 2022.

The defendant shot Gladstone Barrett after a confrontation, causing severe injuries to the elderly man's hand, esophagus and liver. The 72-year-old died 18 days later. Shortly after the crime, Dottin fled to Panama, and he was later extradited to Queens to face charges. A jury convicted Dottin in April of murder in the second degree and two counts of criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree.

In a separate case, two brothers from Astoria pleaded guilty to possessing bombs, assault weapons and 3D-printed ghost guns.

Andrew and Angelo Hatziagelis, 41 and 52, respectively, had improvised explosives

in the home they shared with other family members. The materials were found after a court-authorized search warrant in January 2024. Andrew Hatziagelis is expected to be sentenced to 10 years in prison and his brother is facing four years of incarceration on his sentencing date.



Explosive devices found in defendants' home.

EMPOWERING OUR YOUTH

DA Katz recently met with a group of inquisitive eighth graders who participated in an event hosted by the Youthful Savings Foundation and the Eagle Academy.

It was part of a financial literacy program funded with a \$100,000 grant from the Queens DA's office through its Community Youth Development and Crime Prevention Project. The students in the program are learning how to start profitable businesses by participating in educational activities.

The goal of the program is to help reinforce civic responsibility while also encouraging young people to become the future leaders of their communities.



CELEBRATING AAPI HERITAGE AND THE ISRAEL DAY PARADE

The District Attorney's office recently hosted its annual event marking Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month at the Queens College Patio Room with performances by the Korean American Youth Choir of New York and members of the John Bowne High School Air Force Junior ROTC Color Guard.

During the ceremony, the DA honored both members of the Queens community and two

outstanding staffers from the DA's office. U.S. Rep. Grace Meng, State Sen. John Liu, Assembly Member Steven Raga and others co-sponsored the festivities.

DA Katz also participated in the 75th annual Israel Day Parade, marching with members of the DA's office to highlight the rich heritage and spirit of Israel.

