



MELINDA KATZ DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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A Message from District Attorney

MELINDA KATZ

JUSTICE FOR OUR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

On June 3, 2024, two NYPD officers nearly lost their lives when they were shot as they were attempting to stop the driver of an unregistered motorcycle. Nearly one year after the shootings, the defendant who caused this mayhem pleaded guilty to attempted murder and assault and was sentenced to 28 years in prison.

Officers Richard Yarusso and Christopher Abreu were on patrol in East Elmhurst and spotted Bernardo Raul Castro Mata riding his motorcycle without a helmet on Ditmars Boulevard. Mata was going the opposite direction of posted traffic signs and mounted the sidewalk.

The police approached Mata, who took off on foot with Officers Yarusso and Abreu following him. When the officers reached Mata, he resisted arrest and fired a gun at point-blank range at Officer Yarusso, striking him in the lower chest. He shot Officer Abreu in his right thigh. Both officers were treated and recovered.

It is the job of my office to achieve justice when someone attacks members of law enforcement, who put their lives on the line every day – and it is simply a miracle that Officers Richard Yarusso and Christopher Abreu are alive today.

In Friendship,

DISMANTLING GANGS AND TACKLING YOUTH VIOLENCE

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz joined U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York Joseph Nocella, Jr., along with members of the FBI, to announce the indictment of eight reputed members and associates of the 18th Street gang.

The alleged gang members used violence – including assaults on innocent civilians – to assert control over the Roosevelt Avenue commercial corridor in Jackson Heights. The gang's activities were allegedly financed through drug dealing and other crimes.

The defendants are variously charged with assault, racketeering, drug distribution, trafficking of fraudulent documents and extortion.

"Nobody owns the streets of New York, and nobody owns the streets of Queens County. We will not allow gang members to take control of our communities. My office will continue to combat violent criminal enterprises and assist partner investigations to dismantle gangs as they try to establish themselves in our neighborhoods," DA Katz said.

In a second case, the Queens District Attorney's office charged two teenage girls – both 16-year-olds – with attempted gang assault, attempted robbery and other crimes for allegedly beating a 15-year-old girl on June 2, 2025. A group of teens followed the victim from William Cullen Bryant High School – where they all were students – to the 46th Street M and R train station and viciously attacked the girl in the subway stairwell.

"This was an outrageous display of bullying and brutality," the DA said. "A high school student

was mercilessly tased, kicked, punched and stomped on by a mob of fellow students. This will not be acceptable behavior here in Queens and I will hold students accountable for this behavior to the extent we are allowed under the law."

During the attack, someone in the mob also tried to steal the victim's bookbag as she was being struck in her head, body and face. The 15-year-old was taken to a nearby hospital to be treated for her injuries.

In a separate case, seven teens were recently indicted and charged with attempted murder, gang attack and other crimes for allegedly assaulting two younger teenagers in Kissena Park. The victims were lured into a wooded area in the park and beaten with a metal baseball bat, kicked, punched and had property taken.

"This was an outrageous act of mob violence, and these children will never forget the cruelty they experienced at the hands of these defendants," DA Katz said.



GUN BUYBACK EVENT TAKES GUNS OFF STREETS



District Attorney Katz held her 11th gun buyback event this June. The event was hosted by the Greater Allen AME Cathedral in Jamaica and 74 firearms were surrendered.

Since taking office, the DA has been adamant that illegal guns cause far too many senseless deaths, and shootings devastate families and communities. The gun buybacks are an opportunity for anyone to turn in a working firearm and there are never any questions asked.

During this buyback event, people surrendered 28 revolvers, 23 pistols, five assault weapons, four 3D-printed ghost guns, three shotguns, two rifles, a derringer pistol and eight non-specific firearms. Rewards were given to those surrendering operable guns.

Each firearm collected is potentially a life saved – no one will ever be shot and killed or injured by these guns that have now been removed from the streets of Queens.

The event was co-hosted by the Office of New York State Attorney General Letitia James. Since 2020 the DA's gun buyback events – held at churches throughout Queens – have resulted in a total of 617 guns turned in by citizens.

“Gun buybacks serve as a critical tool for reducing gun violence and promoting public safety within our communities,” said DA Katz. “These firearms will not be used to cause heartache and tragedy.”



CASES OF INTEREST

A defendant was sentenced to 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to assault in the second degree as a hate crime.

Gilbert Augustin, 32, of Jamaica, and victim Jasmer Singh – a Sikh – got into a minor traffic collision near the Van Wyck Expressway. The defendant repeatedly called Singh “turban man” when he and the victim exited their cars after the fender bender. The defendant stole the victim’s cellphone and insisted the police not be called. Singh, 66, retrieved his phone from the defendant, but was punched three times in the head and face by Augustin. Tragically, Singh fell and hit his head on the ground and died after the attack.

In a separate case, a 31-year-old man was sentenced to 34 years in prison following a jury conviction for rape, sexual abuse, kidnapping and other crimes.

Viando Ricketts, of St. Albans, in June 2022 drove a 16-year-old girl in his truck to a motel and raped the teen as she struggled to get away.

In November 2022, Ricketts met a 12-year-old runaway. He offered the girl alcohol and food and took her to a motel, where he also raped her.

The defendant will be required to register as a sex offender after his release and will have 10 years post-release supervision.



GUN VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

District Attorney Melinda Katz and QDA staffers commemorated Gun Violence Awareness Day by wearing orange. The annual event was created to honor lives lost due to gun violence and to push for an end to senseless shootings.

The DA's office is an advocate for a future

free from gun violence and the pain and grief it causes. This is the 11th annual nationwide day to wear orange to bring attention to the 125 people on average shot and killed daily in this country. Hundreds are wounded, changing the lives of victims and their families forever.



BRAVE JUSTICE SUMMER INTERNS

DA Katz welcomed 75 law school and undergraduate students to take part in the nine-week summer Brave Justice Internship. The scholars are from over 35 different colleges and universities, representing those near and far - including St. John's University and Hofstra, as well

as from as far away as Washington and Nevada.

The interns will work on actual cases being prosecuted by the DA's office, participate in a mock suppression hearing and mock jury selection, and tour places like the NYPD Training Academy and an inpatient treatment facility.

