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**QUEENS MAN CHARGED WITH SEX TRAFFICKING, RAPE AND STRANGULATION FOR
SUBJECTING WOMAN TO MONTHS OF ABUSE**

*Defendant Allegedly Choked Victim Until She Lost Consciousness
Faces up to 25 Years in Prison, if Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Leighton Jennings was arraigned on a seven-count indictment charging him with sex trafficking, promoting prostitution, strangulation and rape against a 25-year-old woman. Jennings allegedly hit the woman for not earning enough money for him and used violence, coercion and false promises to profit from her prostitution. After an argument in May 2025, Jennings allegedly strangled her until she lost consciousness.

District Attorney Katz said: "As alleged, this defendant promised to help a young woman and instead subjected her to sex trafficking, months of violence and sexual assault. In one incident, she was choked and lost consciousness. I thank the brave victim for coming forward. If you need assistance, or know of someone who may have been trafficked, call the Human Trafficking Bureau in my office at 718-286-6548."

Jennings, 35, of 166th Street in Jamaica, was arraigned Thursday on a seven-count indictment charging him with three counts of sex trafficking, promoting prostitution in the second degree, strangulation in the second degree and two counts of rape in the third degree.

Queens Supreme Court Justice Peter F. Vallone Jr. ordered the defendant to return to court today. If convicted, Jennings faces up to 25 years in prison.

According to the charges and investigation, the defendant met the 25-year-old victim in July 2024 in Brooklyn where she was engaging in prostitution and living in a temporary shelter. Jennings promised to provide her with housing, necessities and childcare for the woman's baby, and made other representations in exchange for the victim's financial proceeds from engaging in prostitution. The victim agreed and was to surrender \$500 to \$1,000 each day to Jennings, in cash and by way of electronic transfers.

Instead of securing an apartment, as promised, the defendant moved the victim into an apartment he shared with a disabled adult in the Pomonok Houses and later refused to allow the victim's infant to live with them. Jennings allegedly subjected the woman to routine physical abuse and allegedly raped her while she slept.

The defendant took all the financial proceeds the woman made while engaging in prostitution at a Queens hotel between March and May 2025 and in Brooklyn between July 2024 and May 2025.

On May 31, Jennings and the victim became engaged in a verbal argument. He allegedly wrapped his arm around her neck and applied pressure, causing her to lose consciousness.

Two weeks later, on June 20, the victim filed a police report detailing the incident and Jennings was arrested on July 11 and charged with strangulation in the second degree.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Mark Shackel of the NYPD/FBI Child Exploitation/Human Trafficking Task Force and Detective Kevin Deleon of the NYPD Human Trafficking Squad, under the supervision of Sergeant Kevin Kavanagh and Lieutenant Christopher Zizza of the NYPD Human Trafficking Squad and Lieutenant Amy Morin of the NYPD/FBI Child Exploitation/Human Trafficking Task Force, and under the overall supervision of Inspector Cassandra Whitaker, Executive Officer of SVU and Inspector Gary Marcus, Commanding Officer of SVU.

Assistant District Attorney Kiran Cheema, Supervisor in the District Attorney's Human Trafficking Bureau, is prosecuting the case with the assistance of Trial Preparation Assistants Margarita Akbacheva, Hailey Behl, and Bianca Suazo, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Jessica Melton, Bureau Chief, and Marilyn Filingeri, Assistant Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard A. Brave.

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

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