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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2026

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LONG ISLAND MAN CHARGED WITH GRAND LARCENY FOR POSING AS LAWYER AND STEALING MORE THAN \$15,000

Defendant Vanished After Victim Made 17 Payments for Immigration Services; Faces 2 1/3 to 7 Years in Prison, if Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Leonardo Ferretti was charged with grand larceny and other crimes for falsely representing himself as an attorney and charging a Corona woman more than \$15,000 for immigration services. After meeting in December 2022, Ferretti socialized with the victim, allegedly offered a fake business card and provided routine updates on his purported educational and professional milestones in order to persuade her of his legal credentials. By May 2024, Ferretti allegedly accepted a total of \$15,300 from the victim for promised immigration services, then stopped all communication.

District Attorney Katz said: "As alleged, this defendant patiently and maliciously exploited the earnest intentions of a victim in need of legal services. Upon gaining the victim's trust, the defendant is accused of taking more than \$15,000 from her before disappearing. I thank the victim for coming forward and alerting my office to this fraud. I urge anyone, regardless of immigration status, who feels that they may have been taken advantage of to contact our Consumer Fraud Helpline at 718-286-6673."

Ferretti, 50, of Commack, who is also known as Leonardo Valentino Ferretti DiSantorelli, was arraigned Wednesday on a criminal complaint charging him with grand larceny in the third degree, criminal possession of stolen property in the third degree, unauthorized practice of law, and immigrant assistance services fraud in the first degree.

Queens Criminal Court Judge Toko Serita ordered him to return to court on February 25. If convicted, he faces 2 1/3 to seven years in prison.

District Attorney Katz said that, according to the charges and investigation, in December 2022, Ferretti met the victim through an online dating app and sent her a phone number to communicate with him directly on the WhatsApp messaging platform. After exchanging several messages, Ferretti met the woman in person multiple times and continued communicating with her using the messaging app.

The defendant told the victim that he was enrolled at Columbia Law School and was preparing to take the bar exam in 2023. Ferretti then sent the woman a photograph of a business card identifying himself as a "Juris Doctor Candidate, Class of 2022" at "Columbia Law School in the City of New York." The business card listed

the same cell phone number he provided to her earlier as well as an email address at law.columbia.edu as his contact information. The defendant allegedly told the woman he was giving her his card in case in the future she knew anyone who needed legal help.

Several months later, in April 2023, the defendant messaged the victim that he had passed the bar exam.

In May 2023, Ferretti agreed to provide the woman with immigration related legal services in exchange for \$15,000. When the woman said she could not pay that amount in a lump sum, Ferretti agreed to an installment payment plan. In August 2023, he asked her to pay him an additional \$300 for a supposed criminal background check.

Between June 5, 2023, and December 30, 2023, the victim made 16 payments totaling \$11,800 through Zelle to Ferretti for promised immigration services. In July 2023, the woman's brother used Zelle to pay Ferretti \$3,500 to help defray his sister's debt. Seventeen payments totaling \$15,300 were sent using Zelle to two different bank accounts held by Ferretti.

After sending the payments, the woman last communicated with Ferretti around May 20, 2024. He then stopped responding to her multiple efforts to contact him.

An investigation determined that no student named Leonardo Ferretti was ever enrolled at Columbia Law School and that Ferretti had never been admitted to the bar. Investigators found that no application for immigration benefits had been filed with federal authorities on behalf of the victim.

The defendant was arrested by members of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau on January 21.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Elias Chacon from the District Attorney's office with the assistance of Detectives Kenny Chin and Robert Li, under the supervision of Sergeant David Joglar and Lieutenant William Abatangelo. The investigation was conducted with the assistance of Trial Prep Assistant Megan Ogrodnik of the Frauds Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Joshua Trachtenberg of the District Attorney's Frauds Bureau is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Joseph T. Conley III, Bureau Chief, Hana C. Kim, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Acting Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Shawn Clark.

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

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