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NEW JERSEY MAN INDICTED FOR ASSAULT STEMMING FROM 2023 HIT-AND-RUN COLLISION THAT SERIOUSLY INJURED 26-YEAR-OLD MOTORCYCLIST

*Defendant's Driver's License Suspended Three Times at Time of Incident;
Faces More Than 15 Years in Prison if Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that Moustafa Taher was indicted for assault, reckless driving, leaving the scene and other crimes for a motor vehicle collision that took place on November 18, 2023, at the intersection of 29th Street and Broadway in Astoria. Taher struck the victim, who was operating a motorcycle, and seriously injured him. At the time of the incident, the defendant's driving privileges had been suspended on three occasions for failure to answer a summons.

District Attorney Katz said: "As alleged, this defendant was driving with a suspended license, speeding and blowing through red lights when he hit a motorcyclist in Astoria and took off. He then filed a false police report claiming that his car had been stolen to evade responsibility. A long-term investigation by my Vehicular Homicide Unit led to the defendant's identification and apprehension in New Jersey. He was extradited to Queens to face the serious charges leveled against him by a grand jury."

Taher, 21, of Rochelle Park, NJ, was arraigned yesterday on a 16-count indictment charging him with assault in the second degree, leaving the scene of an incident without reporting, tampering with physical evidence, falsely reporting an incident in the third degree, reckless endangerment in the second degree, reckless driving, two counts of aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle in the third degree, two counts of operating or driving a motor vehicle without a license, two counts of failing to obey a traffic control device, failing to stop at a steady red signal, operating a vehicle at unreasonable speed, driving in excess of the maximum speed limit and failing to stop at a sign. Queens Supreme Court Justice Michael Hartofilis ordered the defendant to return to court on March 5. If convicted, Taher faces more than 15 years in prison.

District Attorney Katz said that, according to the charges and investigation, on November 18, 2023, at approximately 5:44 p.m., Taher was driving a 2022 Volkswagen Atlas SUV bearing New Jersey license plates at a high rate of speed northbound on 29th Street in Astoria. Taher allegedly ran multiple steady red lights. As Taher approached Broadway, he again passed through a steady red light and struck the victim, Deivy Lemos Bustamante, 26, who was traveling eastbound on Broadway on a 2023 Yamaha motorcycle.

Bustamante was ejected from the motorcycle and landed at the opposite corner. He was immediately transported to a local hospital suffering from severe head and torso trauma. Bustamante sustained multiple injuries including a cervical spine fracture and is currently unable to walk without the assistance of a cane.

Taher continued traveling down 29th street and did not stop or render aid to the victim. Debris from Taher's vehicle, including a license plate, was left behind at the scene. The vehicle was then abandoned in the vicinity of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway in Woodside. Taher allegedly walked away from the vehicle with another individual and got into another SUV.

At approximately 6:46 p.m., Taher called 911 and reported that the Volkswagen had been stolen from the vicinity of 19th Avenue and 45th Street in Astoria.

The Volkswagen, which had been rented by Taher's mother, was recovered a few hours after the collision in Woodside, missing its front license plate. The vehicle's data recorder showed it had been going 43 mph at the time of the collision. The speed limit on 29th Street was 25 mph.

At the time of the incident, Taher's license had been suspended three times and he was not legally allowed to drive.

The case was investigated by Detective Edward Behringer of the NYPD Collision Investigation Squad along with the District Attorney's Vehicular Homicide Unit. The defendant was arrested on January 13 in New Jersey and was returned to Queens by the NYPD Warrants Squad with assistance from the District Attorney's Extraditions and Renditions team.

Assistant District Attorney Brian Cox of the Vehicular Homicide Unit in the District Attorney's Homicide Bureau is prosecuting the case with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Matthew Hauszpigel under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys John Kosinski, Bureau Chief, and Jonathan Selkowe, Deputy Chief and Chief of the Vehicular Homicide Unit, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Shawn Clark.

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

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