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**DA KATZ ANNOUNCES PADLOCKING OF ILLEGAL CANNABIS STOREFRONT IN
LAURELTON**

*Ongoing Joint Enforcement Efforts with NYPD/NYC Sheriff Cannabis Task Force Resulted in Seizure of Over
700 Pounds of Illicit Cannabis Product and Five Arrests*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced the closure of an unlicensed storefront cannabis dispensary operating out of two locations on Merrick Boulevard in Laurelton. A court-authorized search of the premises resulted in the seizure of hundreds of pounds of illicit cannabis and tobacco products as well as a machete and a total of five arrests. The enforcement efforts, dubbed Operation Weed Whacker, are part of an ongoing joint investigation with the NYPD/NYC Sheriff Cannabis Task Force to identify and shut down illegal cannabis operations across the borough.

District Attorney Katz said: “Unregulated cannabis storefronts continue to pose a serious threat to the safety of our communities, with operators going to increasingly sophisticated lengths to conceal illegal products and evade law enforcement. Many of the seized items are deliberately packaged to mimic popular candy and pastry brands and are clearly intended to attract and appeal to young people. I thank members of my Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau, Detective Bureau, Major Economic Crimes Bureau and our partners at the New York City Sheriff’s Office and the NYPD for their ongoing dedication to this work.”

DA Katz said that, on March 19, members of the Queen’s DA Detective Bureau, the 116th Precinct and the NYC Sheriff Cannabis Task Force executed a search warrant at two locations that were operating jointly as a single unlicensed cannabis dispensary at 217-09/216-17 Merrick Blvd in Laurelton.

As alleged, the operators dispensed and stored cannabis products in one location that appeared to be a shuttered storefront. A second nearby storefront – with signage for a driving school – served as the main location for cannabis transactions with customers.

Five defendants were arrested on-site and charged with varying crimes related to criminal possession of cannabis.

A total of 300 pounds of cannabis flower, 95 pounds of cannabis vapes, 350 pounds of cannabis edibles, 312 pounds of illegal flavored tobacco vapes and 30 pounds of other tobacco products were seized from the location.

This operation is part of the District Attorney’s ongoing effort to rid Queens of illegal dispensaries, whether operating out of trucks and vans or brick-and-mortar commercial locations.

Since November 2022, enforcement operations have resulted in the prosecution of 467 individuals for felony-related charges related to the sale and/or possession of cannabis or controlled substances in Queens.

A total of 345 shops in Queens County have been padlocked since May 2024 through the assistance of the New York City Sheriff's Office, the NYPD and the New York State Police Troop NYC – Queens Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

The case investigation was conducted by Assistant District Attorney Thomas Harrington of the District Attorney's Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau under the supervision of Shanon LaCorte, Bureau Chief, and Brandi Kligman, Assistant Deputy Bureau Chief, with assistance from Supervising Intelligence Analyst Victoria Filipe and Senior Intelligence Analyst Hong Man Lam, as well as Detective Investigator Arthur Bryant and other members of DA Katz's Detective Bureau under the supervision of Lieutenant Joseph Oliver and Sergeant David Moore, and under the overall supervision of the Chief Investigator of the Detective Bureau Robert LaPollo.

The enforcement operation was conducted with the assistance of the members of the NYPD assigned to the 116th Precincts Field Intelligence Team.

Assistant District Attorney Kieran Linehan, Section Chief of the Major Narcotics Unit in the Major Economic Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the cases under the supervision of Mary Lowenburg, Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for the Investigations Division Joseph T. Conley III.

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

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