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**SEX TRAFFICKER SENTENCED TO 44 ½ TO 52 YEARS IN PRISON FOR ABUSING  
THREE WOMEN**

*Defendant Found Guilty of Forcing Victims to Engage in Prostitution, Assaulting Two Repeatedly*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Cleveland Sterling was sentenced to 44 ½ to 52 years in prison after being convicted at trial of sex trafficking, promoting prostitution, robbery and other related crimes. The defendant forced two women to repeatedly engage in prostitution, assaulted them when they refused to follow his orders and forcibly stole money from one of the victims. Sterling was also found guilty of exploiting a third woman who was compelled to have sex with strangers for money at his behest or risk abuse.

District Attorney Katz said: “This defendant preyed on three separate women using violence, intimidation and coercion to force the victims into sexual exploitation for his own profit. A jury found him guilty of these crimes and he has now been sentenced to more than four decades in prison as punishment. Sex trafficking is calculated, cruel and devastating for those who are targeted. We will continue to prosecute these crimes while working with our partner service providers to provide survivors with proper support and resources.”

Sterling, a.k.a. “Rich,” a.k.a. “Dollarz,” 38, of Uniondale, was found guilty by jury on February 13 of sex trafficking, promoting prostitution, robbery, grand larceny, assault, petit larceny and criminal mischief.

Trial openings began on January 28 and closings took place February 9. The jury deliberated for two days before reaching a verdict.

Justice Peter Vallone, Jr., who presided at trial, sentenced Sterling today to 17 years in prison for crimes against the first victim, 20 years in prison for crimes against the second victim, and 7 ½ to 15 years in prison for crimes against the third victim. The terms will run consecutively for a total of 44 ½ to 52 years in prison, to be followed by five years post release supervision. Sterling will have to register as a sex offender upon release.

DA Katz said that according to the investigation and trial testimony, Sterling met the first victim, a 22-year-old woman, in 2019 and forced her to engage in sex for money at various locations in Queens through November 2022. Sterling took photographs of the victim and used them to create online ads for sex. He communicated with customers, arranged prostitution bookings and required the victim to turn over all the proceeds from the sexual encounters directly to him. Sterling struck the victim when she withheld cash or refused to comply with his orders. Sterling routinely inflicted violence on the victim, including when she did not want to have sex with customers for money. On one occasion, he broke some of her teeth. On another

occasion, he struck her in the head with a glass bottle, requiring her to get staples to her head.

Sterling met the second victim, a 19-year-old woman, in August 2021. They began an intimate relationship which transitioned into the defendant instructing the victim to have sex with men in exchange for money. The defendant posted prostitution ads, arranged the encounters and collected all the proceeds from the sex acts. Sterling became violent whenever the victim expressed opposition to engaging in prostitution and assaulted her on numerous occasions. On one occasion in October 2021, the victim alerted the police when the defendant forcibly stole money from her and officers observed bruising about her body.

Sterling met the third victim, a 27-year-old woman, in July 2019 and the two began dating. After approximately two weeks, the defendant took her to the JFK Inn in Queens where he had another victim present. Sterling told the woman that she must now work for him and forced her to take naked photographs for sex advertisements. He ordered the woman to engage in prostitution, arranged the dates and collected the proceeds from the sex acts.

During the course of being trafficked, two of the victims received tattoos bearing a form of the defendant's name that was used to brand them. Sterling told the first victim that she would first have to cut off her own foot because his name was tattooed on it and that it belonged to him. The second victim – who while getting tattooed believed that she was getting a different tattoo – was tattooed with Sterling's street name and told that she was now his property.

The investigations were conducted by Detective Craig Ryan, New York City Police Department's Queens Vice Enforcement Module, under the supervision of Lieutenant Stephen Conforti, Captain Stanislav Levitsky and Assistant Chief Joseph Kenny, along with Assistant District Attorney Tara DiGregorio, the then-Deputy Bureau Chief of the Human Trafficking Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Kiran Cheema, Supervisor in the District Attorney's Human Trafficking Bureau, and Assistant District Attorney Marina Arshakyan of the District Attorney's Human Trafficking Bureau prosecuted the case with the assistance of Paralegal Margarita Akbacheva and Trial Preparation Assistants Hailey Behl and Bianca Suazo, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Jessica Melton, Bureau Chief, Assistant District Attorney Marilyn Filingeri, Assistant Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Joseph T. Conley III.

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