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**FORMER CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE CHARGED WITH FORGERY FOR
DISSEMINATING ALTERED POLITICAL ENDORSEMENTS AND PHONY NEWS
REPORTS**

Defendant Jonathan Rinaldi Allegedly Used AI Technology to Falsely Depict Support from Public Figures and Organizations During District 29 Council Race; Fabricated Articles Against Opponent

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Jonathan Rinaldi has been charged with forgery and criminal possession of a forged instrument for allegedly creating and distributing false political endorsements and fake news articles using artificial intelligence during his 2025 campaign for City Council in District 29. As alleged, the forged graphics included a legitimate endorsement sheet that the defendant modified to falsely depict support for his own campaign. The affected victims include elected officials, non-profit organizations, public institutions and news outlets.

District Attorney Katz said: “Enough is enough. In today’s world it is important to hold people accountable for materially misrepresenting facts. As alleged, the defendant used AI to replace factual political support and launched fabricated attacks against his opponent as fact in a deliberate effort to mislead voters ahead of a City Council election. Protecting the integrity of elections is one of the most important responsibilities of my office. Anyone who uses emerging technology to commit fraud against the voters of this borough will be held to account. I thank members of my Crime Strategies and Intelligence and Public Corruption Bureaus for their painstaking work on this case.”

Rinaldi, 47, of Forest Hills, was arraigned today on a criminal complaint charging him with three counts of forgery in the third degree and 15 counts of criminal possession of a forged instrument in the third degree. Queens Criminal Court Judge Indira Khan ordered the defendant to return to court on August 19. If convicted of the top count, Rinaldi faces a potential maximum sentence of two years in prison.

District Attorney Katz said that, according to the charges and investigation, in January 2025, Rinaldi became a candidate for New York City Council in District 29 in Queens.

Court-authorized subpoena records and search warrants revealed that, between January 17 and November 4, 2025, Rinaldi routinely and deliberately created and posted AI-generated images on his official social media accounts – primarily Facebook and Instagram – that falsely depicted endorsements from individuals and organizations that had not backed his candidacy and in fact, backed the opposition. The defendant also allegedly used specific AI prompts to manufacture fraudulent news articles, using the logo and branding of legitimate news organizations, and posted AI-generated videos depicting support from local public institutions that are not able to participate in politics.

In one instance, on October 20, 2025, Rinaldi posted an altered endorsement sheet using the Queens Jewish Alliance (QJA) logo and branding that misrepresented the organization’s endorsement in the race. While the authentic endorsement sheet from the organization listed the incumbent city council member, Rinaldi’s fraudulently altered version replaced that endorsement with “City Council (R) Jonathan Rinaldi.”

In a recorded call that occurred several days after the image was posted, the head of QJA spoke with Rinaldi to inquire about the altered post. The defendant allegedly stated, in sum and substance, “When you are trying to fight against the establishment, I have to use every available tool that’s at my disposal because I already know that ... you’re never going to give me your endorsement.” QJA asked Rinaldi to take down the fraudulent post. Rinaldi responded by stating, in sum and substance, “It’s politics... I’m just using asymmetrical warfare. I cannot use the same tactics, the same so-called quote unquote, um, uh, uh methods that the establishment uses.”

The manipulated QJA endorsement was taken down but then subsequently re-posted to the

defendant's Facebook and Instagram accounts on October 29, 2025.

Prior to the QJA incident, on October 4, 2025, Rinaldi allegedly published a Facebook post with a fictitious New York Post news article. The article depicted a photograph of the defendant shaking hands with former New York City Council Member Robert Holden under the title, "Council Bob Holden Crosses the Aisle to Endorse Rinaldi for City Council District 29." The fake article with the NY Post heading claimed that Rinaldi and Holden were "launching a bipartisan push" for the benefit of the community. The article was purportedly authored by "Daniel Kurzyna," the former council member's then chief-of-staff.

Records show that approximately two hours before the post was published, the defendant entered the following search term into his own Google's search engine: "bob holden endorses." He then allegedly prompted an AI platform to: "Take the first image and face swap the man in the left on the second image" with a photo of his own face and then to "face swap the man on the left just change the face the head is ok they are both bald just change the face." The generated image fictitiously depicted the defendant shaking hands with the former council member, which Rinaldi placed onto the fraudulent New York Post article.

Rinaldi is also accused of posting fraudulent, AI-generated endorsements from the 112th Police Precinct, P.S. 101 elementary school and the Asian Wave Alliance, a nonpartisan political club for Asian American New Yorkers. The endorsements from the precinct and the school, public institutions that do not allow political endorsements, were AI-generated videos that depicted what appeared to be police officers and children making statements in support of Rinaldi's candidacy. None of the officers or children depicted worked at the precinct or attended P.S. 101.

As alleged, the defendant also manufactured news articles with the newspaper's heading targeting his opponent, the incumbent city council member.

On October 6, 2025, Rinaldi searched Google for information on the council member and the police or NYPD. He recovered a photo from the council member's official Instagram account depicting a legitimate meeting with NYC Sanitation enforcement officers. Rinaldi prompted Google Gemini to place that image onto a fictitious Amsterdam News article. He provided additional prompts to the AI program to: "Change the headline to Mamdani support [incumbent council member] questioned by police" and then instructed the AI tool to change the headline because "you added words and spelled it wrong." The fake article generated by his prompts, titled "Mamdani supporter Councilwoman ... questioned by police for hacking," was posted to Rinaldi's Instagram account approximately one hour later.

Rinaldi is additionally accused of generating and posting fake articles to deceive voters into believing that his opponent had dropped out of the election again with the newspaper's heading.

On October 24, 2025, Rinaldi published a fictitious video to his Facebook account that was generated with Sora, an OpenAI application, with the caption, "!!!!Breaking news!!!! Lynn Schulman drops out of race for city council !!!" The video depicted a purported studio news anchor announcing his opponent's withdrawal from the City Council race. The fictitious news anchor states, "We have breaking news tonight. Moments ago, Schulman announced she is ending her campaign. In a short statement, she said the pressure from the community became impossible to ignore and the race should move forward."

Rinaldi posted several similar fake articles on the same topic: one article was generated using CNN branding; another used the Daily News branding; and two additional videos were manufactured to mimic fictitious broadcast segments.

Rinaldi was arrested on June 24 by members of the Queens District Attorney's Detective Bureau.

The investigation was conducted by Assistant District Attorneys Shanon N. LaCorte, Bureau Chief, and Brandi S. Kligman, Assistant Deputy Chief, of the District Attorney's Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau, and Assistant District Attorney Danielle M. O'Boyle, Assistant Deputy Chief of the District Attorney's Appeals Bureau, with the assistance of Intelligence Analysts Brenda Clark and Hong Man Lam; and members of the District Attorney's Detectives Bureau, under the supervision of Chief Investigator Robert LaPollo.

Senior Assistant District Attorney Leann Staines of the District Attorney's Public Corruption Bureau is prosecuting the case, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Bradley T. King, Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations

Joseph T. Conley III.

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

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