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**THIRTEEN DEFENDANTS SENTENCED FOR ROLES IN ORGANIZED RETAIL
THEFT OPERATION THAT TARGETED HOME DEPOT LOCATIONS IN NINE
STATES**

*All Defendants Pleaded to Felonies;
Largest Organized Theft Operation to be Prosecuted in Queens*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that 13 defendants have pleaded guilty to felony charges and have been sentenced in connection with an organized theft operation that targeted Home Depot locations in New York and eight other states. Members of the Queens-based theft crew stole building supplies, power tools, smoke alarms and other goods in 319 documented thefts, totaling more than \$2.2 million, during a 13-month period. The items were then sold to black market retailers, known as fences, who resold those goods to consumers.

District Attorney Katz said: “This was a remarkable investigation that spanned nine states and 128 Home Depot locations. These 13 defendants stole and resold power tools, appliances and building supplies as part of well-organized and disciplined operation that ultimately took \$2.2 million in merchandise from the retailer. With today’s sentence of three to six years in prison, ringleader Armando Diaz is the last of the 13 defendants to have pleaded to a felony and been sentenced. I thank our partners at the New York State Police and my prosecutors for stopping the criminal conduct and bringing a swift conclusion to the case.”

Armando Diaz, 52, of Flushing, pleaded guilty on July 1 to grand larceny in the first and second degrees and criminal possession of stolen property in the first and second degrees in satisfaction of the indictment. Queens Supreme Court Justice Nestor H. Diaz sentenced him today to three to six years in prison.

Diaz was the last of eight members of the theft crew to be sentenced with the others previously receiving state prison or jail time ranging from 364 days to one to three years. Five other defendants – the fences – have also all been sentenced. **(See addendum.)**

The investigation into the thefts began in June 2024 when members of the DA’s Detective Bureau observed stolen air conditioners from Home Depot while conducting surveillance in a separate matter. An investigation was launched with the New York State Police that included the use of license plate readers and court-authorized electronic surveillance. Home Depot assisted with the investigation by providing crucial video and documentary evidence.

DA Katz said that, according to the indictment and investigation, between August 14, 2024, and September 11, 2025, the theft crew, led by Diaz met almost daily at 5:30 a.m. in a parking lot in East Elmhurst to prepare for the day’s “hits.” The locations of Home Depots to be targeted were determined by a review of

merchandise in each store as shown on the retailer's website and app.

Diaz and seven other members of the theft crew traveled in Diaz's van and in another lookout vehicle to the targeted locations.

Three or four theft crew members were instructed to enter the Home Depot separately. They did not engage with each other once inside and walked through the aisles as if they were browsing.

Diaz, who was on a conference call with the crew through their earbuds, provided directions on what to steal and how, and whether anyone was watching.

Items were routinely placed in a 96-gallon garbage bin, for instance, or in a cart so they could be wheeled out of the store. In some instances, a crew member placed a large piece of sheetrock or plywood in the cart to shield himself as he wheeled it outside. Oftentimes, a member of the crew distracted a Home Depot employee to facilitate another member of the crew leaving the store with stolen goods and without detection.

Among the most common items stolen were insulation kits, buckets of reflective roof coating, power tools, air conditioners and smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

The amount of merchandise stolen in a single day ranged from about \$1,800 to nearly \$35,000.

Once the theft crew had the day's haul, it was sold to the operation's five fences. The merchandise changed hands in a Bronx parking lot and was then driven to storage units in that borough; at a Brooklyn home and a Brooklyn storefront; and on an Elmhurst street corner or an Elmhurst residence.

Diaz unloaded merchandise into his home or into his van and Mercedes Benz.

A court-authorized search of three homes, 14 storage units and eight vehicles resulted in the seizure of voluminous amounts of stolen products, including but not limited to:

- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors
- Air conditioners
- Electrical outlets and outlet boxes
- Lithium-ion batteries
- Copper wire
- Power tools
- Portable jump starters
- Spray foam insulation
- Roof coating
- Housewrap
- Reciprocating saws
- Heat guns
- Bluetooth speakers
- Bolt cutters
- Battery powered chainsaw kits
- Rechargeable flood lights
- Handheld blowers
- Heavy duty tape

The value of the recovered product was \$1,414,444.12. All the seized property will be returned to Home Depot along with \$20,000 in restitution was paid by one defendant.

A total of \$53,770 was forfeited to the Queens District Attorney's Office along with five vehicles.

The investigation was conducted by members of the District Attorney's Detectives Bureau, led by Christopher Gately, under the supervision of Lieutenant Joseph Oliver and Sergeant David Moore, and under the overall supervision of Chief Investigator Robert LaPollo; and Assistant District Attorney Brandi Kligman, Assistant Deputy Bureau Chief of the District Attorney's Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau, with the assistance of Senior Intelligence Analyst Joana Ceballos, Intelligence Analyst Luis Perez-Cortes and Supervising Intelligence Analyst Victoria Plachi, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Shanon N. LaCorte, Bureau Chief; as well as members of the New York State Police Special Investigations Unit under the supervision of Senior Investigator Mark Buglione, and under the overall supervision of Lieutenant Timothy Gould and Major James Browne.

The Department of Homeland Security Investigations, the New York State Office of the Attorney General's Special Operations Unit and Home Depot also provided assistance.

Assistant District Attorneys Kligman and Catherine Jahn, Section Chief in the District Attorney's Financial Frauds Bureau, prosecuted the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Shanon N. LaCorte, Bureau Chief of the Crime Strategies and Intelligence Bureau, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of Investigations Joseph T. Conley III.

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ADDENDUM

Armando Diaz, 52, of Flushing, pleaded guilty on July 1 to grand larceny in the first and second degrees and criminal possession of stolen property in the first and second degrees in satisfaction of the indictment. Diaz was sentenced on October 5 to three to six years in prison.

Francisco Ayala-Ariza, 36, of Woodhaven, pleaded guilty on May 20 to grand larceny in the first degree. Ayala-Ariza was sentenced on June 10 to one to three years in prison.

Wilfredo "Fredo" Arango-Calle, 38, of Oakland Gardens, pleaded guilty on June 1 to grand larceny in the first degree. Arango-Calle was sentenced on June 18 to one to three years in prison.

Oscar Eduardo Valencia Diaz, 41, of Middle Village, pleaded guilty on May 18 to grand larceny in the first degree. Diaz was sentenced on June 15 to one to three years in prison.

Mateo Arias Toro, 30, of Middle Village, pleaded guilty on June 29 to grand larceny in the second degree. Toro was sentenced on July 23 to one to three years in prison.

Victor Diaz, 51, of Flushing, pleaded guilty on April 13 to grand larceny in the third degree. He was sentenced on April 13 to 364 days in jail.

Joana Carolina "La Mona" Fermin, 39, of Hicksville, pleaded guilty on June 11 to criminal possession of stolen property in the third degree. She was sentenced on September 30 to 364 days in jail.

Freddy “El Torito” Padilla, 46, of the Bronx, pleaded guilty on July 23 to criminal possession of stolen property in the third degree. Padilla was sentenced on July 23 to five years of probation.

Jonathan Tascon Suarez, 32, of Orange County, pleaded guilty on February 18 to grand larceny in the third degree. Suarez was sentenced on February 18 to 364 days in jail.

Kyle “Italian” Goonan, 35, of Brooklyn, pleaded guilty on March 24 to grand larceny in third degree. Goonan was sentenced on April 23 to three years of probation.

David Araque Montoya, 32, of Middle Village, pleaded guilty on June 8 to grand larceny in third degree. Montoya was sentenced on June 8 to 364 days in jail.

Angel Yamba Ortiz, 30, of Elmhurst, pleaded guilty on June 29 to criminal possession of stolen property in the fourth degree. Ortiz was sentenced on June 29 to a conditional discharge.

Nechemia Blatter, 62, of Brooklyn, pleaded guilty on August 17 to criminal possession of stolen property in the third degree. Blatter was sentenced on August 17 to a conditional discharge and must pay restitution to Home Depot in the amount of \$20,000.

Note to Editors: Archived press releases are available at www.queensda.org.

