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SIX AIRPORT TAXI DISPATCHERS CHARGED IN UNDERCOVER STING OPERATION

*Allegedly Received Bribes To Let Taxi Drivers Skip Holding Area Waiting Lines At JFK
And Go Directly to Terminals and Make Passenger Pick-Ups*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by Port Authority (“PA”) Inspector General Robert E. Van Etten, New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission (“TLC”) Commissioner Matthew W. Daus, and Gateway Frontlines Services, announced today that six airport taxi dispatchers at John F. Kennedy International Airport have been charged with accepting cash payments from taxi drivers who wanted to go directly to terminals to pick up passengers instead of to the central taxi holding area where drivers often wait up to three hours or more before being moved to the terminals. The investigation is continuing and more arrests are expected.

District Attorney Brown said, “The bribery scam in which the defendants were allegedly involved allowed taxi drivers to basically ‘cut the line’ and get ahead of honest drivers waiting their turn for passengers. Through the alleged bribes paid each time amounted to only a few dollars, on busy days, thousands of cabs pass through JFK’s terminals during an eight-hour shift – giving a dishonest dispatcher the opportunity to illegally make hundreds of dollars on a daily basis.”

PA Inspector General Van Etten said, “I want to thank District Attorney Brown, Commissioner Daus, and Gateway for a successful collaboration in ferreting out this corrupt scheme. These defendants took unfair advantage of a dispatching process that was created to provide a level playing field for all cab drivers. This should serve as a deterrent to those working and visiting all Port Authority facilities that playing the system will not be tolerated.”

TLC Commissioner Daus said, “Taxicab drivers work hard enough to earn a living without being prey to unscrupulous dispatchers soliciting bribes and tempting them with the prospect of unfairly jumping ahead of their fellow drivers. I am justifiably proud of the TLC’s significant role in the teamwork that went into this investigation and the resulting arrests, and I believe this sends a very positive message to taxi drivers that their voices are heard loud and clear when they have concerns and problems.”

John Hook, Director of Compliance & Professional Standards for Gateway Frontline Services, said, “Gateway Frontline Services has a long track record of managing service delivery to aviation passengers in the NY/NJ region with excellence. We hold in high esteem the paramount values of integrity and ethics. Our

commitment to these values is evident in our continuous internal quality assurance audits. We are privileged to have worked with the offices of the Queens District Attorney, the Port Authority of NY and NJ Inspector General and the Port Authority Police Department as a critical partner in this joint investigation which culminated in the arrest of six taxi dispatchers.”

Taxi dispatchers are responsible for regulating the movement of taxis from the central taxi holding pen to each of the terminal taxi pick-up areas at JFK Airport. The average wait in the holding area is approximately two to three hours, after which time the taxis are summoned as needed for incoming flights from the holding area to terminal pick-up in the order that they arrived. Upon exiting the holding pen, each taxi driver is issued a “dispatch ticket,” on which is printed the taxi’s medallion number, as well as the date and time of their exiting the holding area.

On April 6, 2009, the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission expanded a program in which drivers of medallion taxicabs receive Short Haul (“shorty”) tickets for rides to local destinations close to the airport to include destinations in the Five Towns area of Nassau County. The shorty ticket allows drivers to bypass the holding area and go directly to the terminal pick-up for their next fare. Drivers are not allowed to pay for shorty tickets nor are dispatchers permitted to sell them.

The alleged taxi dispatcher scheme was uncovered in May 2009 when several medallion cab drivers became suspicious and notified the Taxi and Limousine Commission. After a preliminary review, the TLC notified the Port Authority Inspector General’s Office and the Queens District Attorney’s Rackets Bureau. Thereafter the District Attorney’s Office and the Port Authority Inspector General’s Office began an investigation into the bribery scheme. In May through August of this year investigators conducted field operations, including the use of confidential informants, visual observations, surveillance, and recorded conversations, as well as multiple “sting operations” by an undercover Port Authority police detective.

During this same time period, in keeping with their own business practice standards, Gateway Frontline Services – the Port Authority subcontractor which employs the dispatchers – also noticed aberrations and conducted their own internal compliance audit and investigation. Gateway’s own corporate investigators made observations of illegal activity and promptly terminated certain dispatchers not in compliance with corporate standards and assisted law enforcement in obtaining evidence to be used in criminal prosecution of the defendants.

According to the criminal charges, the six defendants accepted cash payment of five to ten dollars from undercover drivers on multiple occasions between May and July 2009 in exchanging for providing them with shorty tickets.

The defendants are charged with second-degree commercial bribe receiving, official misconduct and receiving unlawful gratuities, all of which are Class A misdemeanors. If convicted, the defendants each face up to two years in jail. (See Addendum for details on the defendants).

The investigation was conducted by Detective Steve Poulos and Investigator Arthur Maisano of the Port Authority Inspector General’s Office, under the supervision of Deputy Inspector General Michael Nestor, and with the assistance of Deputy Commissioner of Uniformed Services Pansy Mullings of the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission and Ira Goldstein, Chief of Staff to New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission/Chair Matthew W. Daus, with the assistance of Gateway Frontline Services Director of Compliance and Professional Standards John Hook.

Assistant District Attorneys Catherine C. Kane, Chief of the District Attorney's Airport Investigations Unit, and Hana Kim are prosecuting the cases under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Gerard A. Brave, Chief of the District Attorney's Organized Crime and Rackets Bureau, and Assistant District Attorney Mark Katz, Deputy Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that criminal charges are merely accusations and that defendants are presumed innocent until prove guilty.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted on www.queensda.org

ADDENDUM

The six defendants are:

GREGORY ARCHER, 32, of 803 Vermont Street in Brooklyn. He has been employed as a dispatcher for two years.

JULIO HERNANDEZ, 42, of 95-64 113 Street in South Richmond Hill, Queens. He has been employed as a dispatcher for one and a half years.

DENNIS HUMPHREY, 46, of 116-16 198 Street in St. Albans, Queens. He has been employed as a dispatcher for three years.

KEITHON PIPPINS, 29, of 314 East Clinton Street in Roosevelt, Long Island. He has been employed as a dispatcher, employed one year;

JACQUELINE RUSSELL, 48, of 178 Highland Boulevard in Brooklyn. She has been employed as a dispatcher for one and a half years.

RHEA WHITE, 26, of 209-39 112 Road in Queens Village, Queens. She has been employed as a dispatcher for two and a half years.

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