



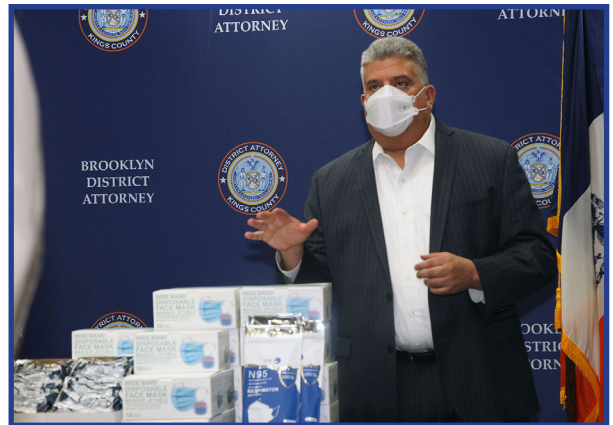
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Response to the COVID-19 Emergency: Keeping Employees and Communities Safe While Ensuring Justice

The sudden and monumental challenge of the coronavirus crisis this spring required a decisive response and unprecedented considerations. In a short period of time, the court system and the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office had to adapt and mitigate the spread of the virus among their employees, their families, victims, witnesses and everyone else who's involved in the criminal justice process: lawyers, defendants, judges and court personnel.

The Office started to prepare well before the shutdown. When it became clear that it was inevitable that the virus would reach the United States, the executive team devised a plan that would allow almost all 1,200 employees to work remotely – a first of its kind endeavor. The entire staff rose to the challenge. Even as Supreme Court temporarily slowed down and moved to a model of virtual hearings, our Assistant District Attorneys were in contact with victims, court personnel and defense attorneys, all working to remotely process and arraign newly arrested defendants in Criminal Court.



DA Gonzalez with PPE that was distributed to employees and communities across Brooklyn

In keeping with District Attorney Gonzalez's Justice 2020 vision and in an effort to slow the spread, it was determined that low-level arrests would not be prosecuted – it didn't make sense to put those arrested for minor, non-violent offenses through the system, placing them in close contact with others, where they could become exposed to the virus and possibly expose their family members as well. These defendants overwhelmingly had cases that were not bail eligible. In other cases, again involving non-violent defendants, prosecutions were deferred until courts reopen.

It also quickly became clear that some of the most vulnerable populations that could be exposed to the virus were defendants being held on Rikers Island. DA Gonzalez had been among the first in the state to call for the closing of Rikers in favor of smaller, borough-based jails prior to the spread of the virus.

In that spirit, and to lessen the spread of the virus, the DA convened a panel of his top executives to review the defendants being held at Rikers on pending cases to see which ones could be safely released to the community while awaiting a resolution of their cases. It was also determined that bail would only be requested for serious felony cases.

Meanwhile, the DA, members of his Office of Public Engagement and other volunteers from the staff regularly went out to communities across Brooklyn to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and food. The Office sponsored or participated in dozens of such distribution events in partnership with other city agencies, non-profits, elected officials and community

Continues on Page 3



A Message From DA Eric Gonzalez

Welcome to the Fall 2020 edition of Justice News, the Brooklyn DA's Office's newsletter. The past six months have been incredibly difficult as our country and our borough have been facing a devastating pandemic, an economic collapse and unrest over the justified call for social justice in the face of systemic racism. I would like to start off by offering my sympathies to those who have lost a loved-one to COVID-19.



Throughout the unprecedented times we are living through, our Office continued its operation while doing our part in slowing the spread of the virus and ensuring fairness amid civil rights protests. You can read about our efforts in these pages, as well as about recent successes in protecting workers, immigrants and victims of sexual assaults.

The latest and most urgent challenge we face is the worrisome increase in gun violence across the city and in a number of Brooklyn communities. The senseless shootings and bloodshed have claimed the life of a 1-year-old baby, of teenagers playing basketball and of too many others.

I believe there are a number of reasons for this spike, starting with the social conditions of the COVID lockdown. People have been pent up, under stress, traumatized for months. Social services are limited. Jobs have disappeared by the tens of thousands in communities that were already struggling. At one point, around 20% of the police force was out sick and at another, it was diverted to police the protests. And court operations have been hampered by the virus, delaying indictments and trials.

I also believe that we have the tools, experience and knowledge to stop the bloodshed. We know from our intelligence-gathering operation that a small number of people, affiliated with known gangs and crews, are the ones doing most of the shootings. We know who many of them are, and we are working with the police, the courts and the community to focus resources on these drivers of crime and get them off the street. Community participation is imperative. We have been partnering with violence interrupters and community policing organizations who are best positioned to prevent shootings before they happen and to deescalate tensions. I also call on every member of our neighborhoods to help us by coming forward with information about these crimes.

To ensure that all of our resources are laser-focused at combatting this issue, I recently created the Gun Violence Suppression Bureau to oversee all firearms cases. The bureau, headed by a seasoned prosecutor who tried over 100 cases, will work closely with law enforcement agencies to expeditiously collect and enhance the evidence necessary for successful prosecutions, reduce gun recidivism and train assistants who are assigned to firearm cases to help overcome hurdles in prosecuting these often-difficult cases.

We know how to fight this scourge. From 2015 through the end of last year, we drove homicides down by a third in Brooklyn. We drove shootings down almost 40%. And we did it while reducing arrests by almost 40% as well. I am confident that we can restore these gains in public safety without compromising fairness. It will take an all-out effort to overcome the challenges we're facing but I have no doubt that Brooklyn is up to the task.

Stay safe and healthy, help out your neighbors and take pride in our strength and sense of community.

God bless.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Gonzalez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gang Takedowns Target Drivers of Violent Crime

At the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, we are focusing on the small number of individuals and criminal enterprises responsible for most violent crime. By focusing our efforts on the individuals orchestrating the most serious crimes and by disrupting gangs with precise enforcement actions, we can interrupt cycles of violence, cut off sources of drugs and guns, and help build safer communities. Two recent gang takedowns underscore our efforts in this area.



DA Gonzalez holds one of the 16 firearms recovered in gang investigation

Earlier this year, DA Gonzalez and Police Commissioner Dermot Shea announced a 122-count indictment of 34 alleged members of two rival Brownsville-based street gangs known as WOOO (We On Our Own) and CHOO. The defendants were variously charged with attempted murder, conspiracy, assault, criminal possession of a weapon, and related charges in connection with 13 shootings, including nine shootings in which the intended targets or innocent bystanders were struck.

"This indictment reflects the commitment of my office and the NYPD to continue to work together to target those individuals responsible for senseless shootings that endanger innocent people," said DA Gonzalez. "We allege that these gang members' primary activity is to track rivals and to shoot at each other on sight on the streets of Brooklyn."

Members of the WOOO gang also allegedly exploited young girls to act as "holsters," carrying guns for gang

members to provide weapons as needed and insulating members from exposure to gun charges. Two violent incidents charged to members include a July 2018 shooting near the Fulton Mall area of Downtown Brooklyn that wounded an alleged gang member and two innocent bystanders and a September 2018 shooting at a Brownsville apartment building that nearly struck two young children as they slept.

In another takedown, the DA and the NYPD successfully disrupted another violent criminal organization with the arrest of 10 alleged members of the Brick Squad street gang who were charged in a 48-count indictment with conspiracy to commit murder and sell narcotics, among other charges.

The well-organized, hierarchical gang allegedly operated a sprawling criminal enterprise which extended across numerous neighborhoods in Brooklyn and distributed drugs outside the city as far away as Bangor, Maine. It is alleged that between March 2017 and December 2019, Brick Squad members engaged in violence, including murder and shootings, to establish dominance over their territory and sold heroin laced with fentanyl, crack cocaine and marijuana to make money for the gang.

Gang takedowns impact public safety well beyond initial arrests. We are confident that incapacitating these criminal organizations will measurably improve the safety of our communities.

Response to the COVID-19 Emergency: Keeping Employees and Communities Safe While Ensuring Justice (Continued from Page 1)



The DA with his COVID Response Team in a meeting at the height of the pandemic.

groups, with participants putting themselves in harm's way to make sure that those in need are served during this crisis.

The partners in this effort included Campaign for Hunger, WIADCA, Restoration Plaza, S.O.S., City Harvest, Restaurant Depot & Jetro, ShopRite, Roti on the Run, Exotic Fruits and Vegetables, Blessed Sacrament R.C. Church Food Pantry, 69th Precinct Community Council, and 75th Precinct Community Council.

Over the summer, as the City and our courts began to reopen, the DA's Office employees, considered essential workers, selflessly started to return to work to ensure that hearings and other proceedings are taking place. The Office has taken extensive steps to make it safe for employees and guests, included partitions, free PPE, temperature checks and more.

DA Gonzalez is committed to continuing to safely provide all services to our community and make sure that justice is done even during these difficult and extraordinary times.



Members of the Office of Public Engagement providing information materials and resources with the 79th Precinct Clergy Council



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Protecting the Safety of Brooklyn's Construction Workers

As development in Brooklyn continues its rapid pace, our Office is keeping a watchful eye on developers and construction companies willing to cut corners or compromise workers' safety to pad their bottom lines. Our message is clear: builders who prioritize profits over the lives and well-being of their employees will be held accountable.

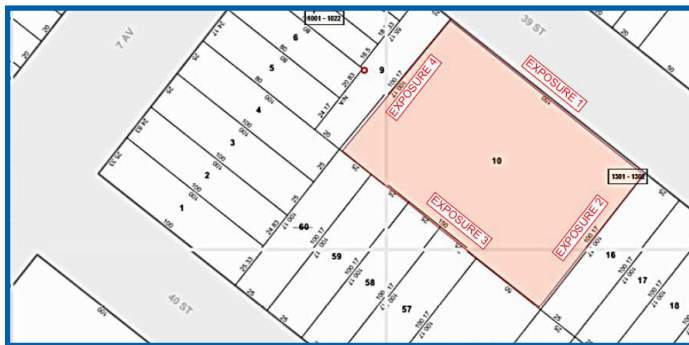


Luis Almonte Sanchez

In November, the DA's Office, working together with the Department of Investigation (DOI), the Department of Buildings (DOB) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), filed an indictment charging the operator of a construction company, as well as a foreperson, engineer and two businesswomen with reckless manslaughter and related charges for the September 2018 death of Luis Almonte

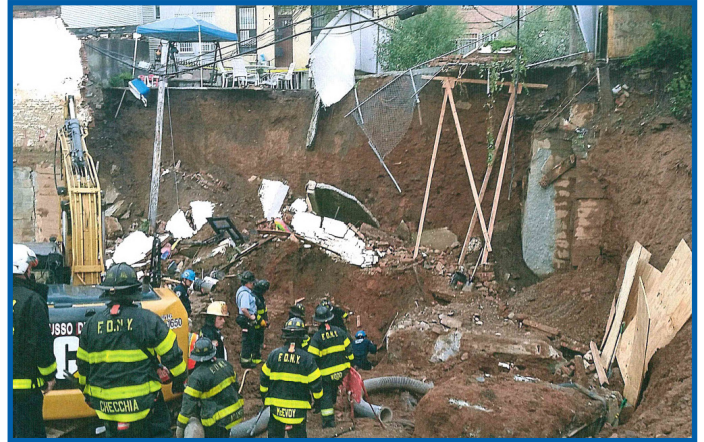
Sanchez, a laborer who was buried in debris following a wall collapse at a Sunset Park job site.

Despite repeated warnings of dangerous conditions at the site — where workers were performing demolition, excavation and foundation work to erect a four-story manufacturing facility and underground garage — it is alleged that the owner of the excavation company refused to stop work or take additional safety precautions. On September 12, 2018, disaster struck when a portion of the support excavation system and an existing masonry wall collapsed on Sanchez, 47, burying him under thousands of pounds of debris.



Map of construction site

It is alleged that the defendants did not ensure the construction site was compliant with safety regulations established by the DOB and OSHA and that they failed to follow design plans submitted and approved by the DOB. Instead, the defendants allegedly went forward without a plan, leading to a host of safety hazards, including an excessively deep excavation, improper installment of the underpinning system and neglect of safe bracing procedures.



Rescue workers at site of wall collapse

Furthermore, in the days before the collapse, it is alleged that two of the defendants were informed by several workers of potentially dangerous conditions, including that the rear wall was moving forward and needed to be braced with an additional beam. A neighbor who lives immediately adjacent to the rear wall also told the defendants that her patio and garage had caved in. Despite those warnings, the defendants allegedly refused to direct the workers to install additional bracing or halt work at the site to assess or remedy the conditions.



Aftermath of wall collapse

Instead, the defendants allegedly ordered workers to continue working on the underpinning at the rear of the site and, in the days immediately before the collapse, allowed a trucking company to remove truckloads of dirt during a heavy rain storm, further destabilizing the site and causing the fatal collapse.

Builders in Brooklyn cannot compromise the safety of construction workers, many of whom are vulnerable immigrants. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that workers are protected and prosecute employers who recklessly put them in harm's way.

Securing a Landmark Legal Win for Brooklyn's Immigrants

In Brooklyn, a borough of immigrants from all over the world, the DA's Office is committed to protecting all of our diverse communities. For the past three years, the Trump administration dramatically ramped up a disturbing tactic of conducting immigration raids in and around courthouses. These arrests frightened many immigrants and caused a decrease in cooperation with law enforcement. In June, DA Gonzalez secured a major victory that prevents Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) from making such arrests.

A federal judge ruled in favor of our lawsuit, filed by DA Gonzalez and New York Attorney General Letitia James last September, ending the policy that allowed ICE agents to make civil immigration arrests in state courthouses. These arrests compromised public safety, violated constitutional rights, and impeded the administration of justice by discouraging noncitizens from reporting crimes and participating in the judicial process.



DA Gonzalez and New York Attorney General Letitia James announce lawsuit against ICE

"For more than three years, I have been calling on ICE to stop its unconscionable practice of conducting immigration raids in and around our courthouses because they jeopardize public safety," said DA Gonzalez. "But the Trump Administration only escalated this unlawful and dangerous tactic, creating a chilling effect in immigrant communities, which discouraged victims and witnesses from reporting crimes and participating in the legal process. Allowing every resident equal access to our justice system is crucially important and necessary for maintaining fairness and public safety."

The lawsuit challenged the legality of the federal government's expanded policy of arresting immigrants in or around state courthouses, which led to a 1700% spike in such arrests. This pattern of civil arrests and the fear they

have caused forced the DA's Office to dismiss cases or reduce charges when witnesses were too fearful to cooperate and caused a major disruption to court operations. The judge found that ICE acted unlawfully by ignoring long-held common laws that protect courthouses and put an immediate end to the practice.

Keeping Affordable Housing Free of Fraud

The high-demand for affordable housing in Brooklyn presents opportunities for corrupt housing managers to game the system or for tenants who cheat to get a home at below-market rates. Our office remains vigilant in its efforts to root out corruption and ensure that only eligible tenants have access to affordable housing.

Most recently, DA Gonzalez filed an indictment charging three women who controlled the application process for apartments at the Luna Park Housing Corporation, a Mitchell-Lama complex in Coney Island, with conspiracy, grand larceny and forgery. It is alleged that the defendants, who include the Board of Directors president, treasurer and the corporation's office manager, accepted approximately \$874,000 in bribes from ineligible applicants who were seeking to get apartments at significantly below market value.

The defendants allegedly abused their positions at Luna Park by accepting bribes that ranged from \$10,000 to \$120,000 from apartment applicants. In exchange for the bribes, the defendants allegedly prepared and submitted fraudulent and forged documents to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to give priority to tenants who paid bribes over otherwise qualified applicants. The documents falsely indicated that the applicants were related to tenants who vacated the apartment and that they lived in those homes for at least two years – a criteria that allowed them to bypass the years-long waiting list.

Over the course of the scheme, the defendants allegedly unlawfully transferred at least 18 apartments with a fair market value of around \$5 million. The defendants used the hundreds of thousands they allegedly received in



DA Gonzalez shows some of the purchases made by defendants in the Luna Park bribery scheme

bribes to purchase fur coats, designer handbags, jewelry and real estate in Florida.

DA Gonzalez said, "My office, working with our law enforcement partners, will continue to root out fraud and corruption to ensure that New York's scarce affordable housing opportunities are not corrupted by fraudsters trying to make a profit, but distributed fairly and honestly."

As a result of a long-term investigation coordinated with the Department of Investigation, three Luna Park tenants were later arrested for allegedly submitting forged documents and giving false statements to purchase apartments to which they were not entitled.

The bogus documents, which included forged birth and marriage certificates, were allegedly used to leap ahead of honest, law-abiding home seekers who were waiting for affordable housing units to become available.



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DA Staffers in Leadership Positions

The recent promotions of these two dedicated law enforcement professionals brings a wealth of valuable experience and leadership skills to our Trial Division and Immigrant Affairs Unit.



David Klestzick

In February, ADA David Z. Klestzick, former Chief of the Green Zone Trial Bureau, was appointed to the DA's Executive Team as a Deputy Chief in the Trial Division. In his new role, Klestzick supervises the Early Case Assessment Bureau, Grand Jury and our five Trial Zones.

A Brooklyn native, Klestzick has a deep knowledge of the issues affecting our communities and has contacts in neighborhoods across the borough. Since he

joined our office as a paralegal in 1991 while attending Brooklyn Law School, he has risen through the ranks.

Under Klestzick's guidance, the Green Zone recognized and began targeting gang members involved in increasingly sophisticated white-collar crimes, including bank fraud and identity theft. This approach cut off lucrative sources of money for gang activity and took drivers of crime off the street. We are confident that his unwavering dedication to justice and proven ability as a lawyer, manager and innovator will continue to benefit our office for years to come.



Gloria Rios

The January promotion of ADA Gloria Rios, formerly a Deputy Chief in the Blue Zone Trial Bureau, to Chief of the Immigrant Affairs Unit reflects our ongoing commitment to protect Brooklyn's immigrant communities, minimize draconian immigration consequences and prosecute those who prey on vulnerable populations.

Rios has been with our office since graduating from Brooklyn Law School in 1995 and has served in several leadership positions, including as a Deputy Chief in the Major Narcotics Investigations Bureau where she supervised the Office's search warrant program and managed long-term narcotics and firearms trafficking investigations with city, state and federal law-enforcement agencies.

Rios, whose parents immigrated from Colombia, is fluent in Spanish and has a proven track record and the know-how to serve our diverse immigrant communities and guide our groundbreaking immigration policy.

Continuing Our Support for Victims of Sexual Assault

Continuing to provide compassionate, holistic support for survivors of sexual assault and holding defendants accountable are key components of our mission to keep Brooklyn safe and strengthen community trust in our justice system. In Brooklyn, victims of sexual assault are treated with sensitivity and respect.

Last spring, our Justice 2020 committee on gender-based violence, working with our Special Victims and Domestic Violence Bureaus, recommended several initiatives that further establish Brooklyn as a national model for how to best handle cases of gender-based violence, acquaintance rape and sexual assault. Among the initiatives we have worked on are improved training, enhanced cooperation with our law enforcement partners, lobbying for new legislation, and strengthening community partnerships, including with local colleges and universities.

Our efforts include providing all Special Victims and Domestic Violence ADAs with training in trauma-informed interviewing skills so they can gather critical evidence while minimizing further trauma, and providing victim advocates to all survivors, regardless of whether a case is prosecuted. From beginning to end, sexual



DA Gonzalez addressing the Campus Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Symposium at Medgar Evers College

assault cases are handled by a single ADA to spare victims the pain of recounting their trauma to multiple attorneys and, at every stage of their case, our ADAs and advocates keep survivors informed and make sure they understand the proceedings.

Finally, we are continuing our Campus Sexual Assault Response Initiative to connect students to our Office and a range of social service providers.

Celebrating and Carrying on the Legacy of Juneteenth

The enduring protests over systemic racism remind us that more than 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, the struggle for equal justice and fundamental fairness continues.

This Juneteenth – a commemoration of the end of American Slavery after the Union Army suppressed the lingering pocket of Confederate resistance in Galveston, Texas and announced that the enslaved were free – the DA's Office joined members of the community to celebrate Brooklyn's racial and ethnic diversity, prepare cultural foods and march in parades.

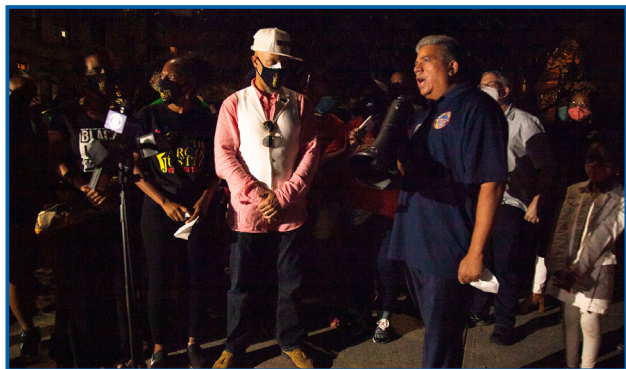
Prosecutors from the Office also reflected on the significance of Juneteenth – which will be recognized as a holiday in New York starting next year – and its relevance to their work as we continue to create a fairer, more equitable justice system.

As our fight moves forward, we are inspired by this triumph of good over evil and the magnificent women and men who broke seemingly unbreakable chains of bondage.



DA Gonzalez standing with community leaders in celebration of Juneteenth and in support of a fairer, more just city

The DA's Office in the Community



Speaking out against gun violence with mourners at Bed-Stuy's Raymond Bush Playground



Painting a Black Lives Matter mural outside the Billie Holiday Theatre in Restoration Plaza



Lending a helping hand at the Farragut Houses Appreciation Luncheon for essential workers



Hosting a food distribution drive in Starrett City, a community that suffered terrible losses from COVID-19



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CONTACT THE BROOKLYN DA'S OFFICE

The District Attorney's Action Center is available to assist the people of Brooklyn with criminal justice matters such as domestic violence, child abuse, school violence, immigration fraud, gun and illegal drug activity in their community. Complaints can be made anonymously, over the phone or in-person. Trained specialists in the DA's Action Center are available to evaluate complaints and determine next steps to resolve a matter.

In an emergency, call 911.

If you or someone you know is the victim of a crime or has information about a crime, please visit, write or call:

The District Attorney's Action Center

350 Jay Street 16th Floor
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Action Center Hotline:

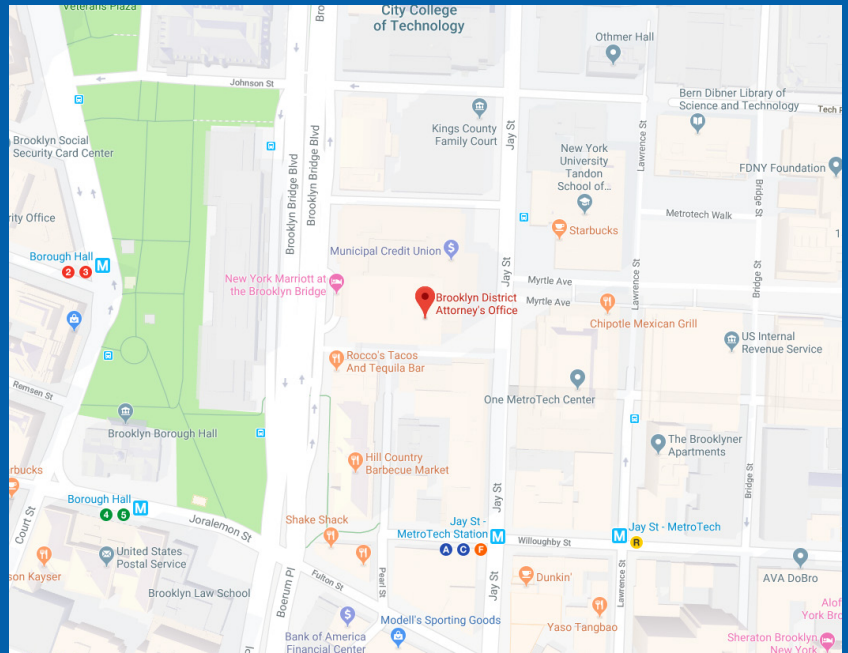
(718) 250-2340

(In case of an emergency, call 911)

Hours of Operation:

Monday through Friday: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Walk-ins are welcome between 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.



Other Important Numbers

Victim Services Unit:	(718) 250-3820
Public Integrity Unit:	(718) 250-2747
Domestic Violence Bureau:	(718) 250-3300
Brooklyn Family Justice Center:	(718) 250-5111
Elder Abuse Unit:	(718) 250-5299
Immigrant Affairs Unit:	(718) 250-3333
Labor Fraud Unit:	(718) 250-3770
Human Trafficking Unit:	(718) 250-2770
Teen Dating Violence Program:	(718) 250-3321
Hate Crimes Bureau:	(718) 250-4949
Red Hook Community Justice Center:	(718) 923-8200
Re-Entry Bureau:	(718) 250-3281