



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Fighting Gang Violence	1
Message from District Attorney	2
Ensuring Safer Streets	3
Working with Communities to Get Guns Off Our Streets	3
Targeting Alleged Gun Trafficking Ring	4
Safeguarding Senior Citizens	4
Learning from Wrongful Convictions	5
Protecting Homeowners	5
Focus on Managers	6
Uplifting Our Neighbors in Need	7
In the Community	7
Important Numbers	8

Keeping Brooklyn Safe from Gang-Driven Violence

To keep Brooklyn safe amid the recent surge in gun violence, the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office and our partners in law enforcement continue to concentrate our efforts on the small number of individuals and criminal associations responsible for most violent crime. Our priority is to dismantle gangs with precise enforcement actions that interrupt the cycles of violence and retaliation, cut off sources of weapons and funds, and help build safe, resilient communities.



DA Gonzalez and NYPD Chief of Detectives Rodney Harrison have prioritized takedowns targeting gangs and crews in their fight against violent crime

In January, our Office secured a major victory in our fight against violent street crimes as District Attorney Eric Gonzalez announced two indictments charging 15 alleged members of the 900 gang, an umbrella organization comprised of several violent street crews operating in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The alleged members were variously charged with murder, conspiracy to commit murder and to possess weapons, attempted murder and related charges.

“These indictments reflect our commitment to stem the surge in gun violence that we have experienced since last spring,” DA Gonzalez said. “Many of these defendants are accused of recklessly opening fire in broad daylight, endangering not only their rivals but innocent passersby, including children.”

Between April 2019 and November 2020, it is alleged that 900 gang members, including members of the Stack Money Goons (SMG) and Jayson Fam (JSF), engaged in violence to establish dominance over territory within Bedford-Stuyvesant and control over the Sumner Houses, Tompkins Houses and 303 Vernon Avenue development of the New York City Housing Authority. To achieve those goals, 900 members allegedly committed two murders and at least six shootings that were charged in the indictment.

Continues on Page 6



A Message From DA Eric Gonzalez

Welcome to the Spring 2021 edition of Justice News, the Brooklyn DA's Office newsletter. In these pages you can read about some of the progress we have made to help us recover from last summer's spate of violence and enhance public safety in Brooklyn. Three articles highlight our multi-pronged approach to gun violence: taking down gang members who are responsible for most of the mayhem, cutting down the supply of firearms by targeting trafficking rings that bring weapons from down south to Brooklyn, and hosting gun buyback events to allow the community to do its part. You can also read about successes in protecting seniors and homeowners from fraud and about efforts by our Office to feed neighbors in need during this devastating pandemic and economic insecurity.



As we move toward the turn of the seasons, we enter a new period of hope, and I believe the cloud of COVID-19 will start to lift with more widely-available vaccines and a new federal administration that will usher in far more effective and equitable policies.

In the DA's Office, we are turning the page on 2020 and looking ahead to the future. As many of you know, my action plan known as Justice 2020 guided our approach over the past several years. I am proud to report that out of the 17 recommendations that were suggested by a diverse committee of reform leaders and community members, we have completed or made substantial progress on 15 of them.

“Working together with the communities we serve is part and parcel of achieving a smaller, more just system.”

As we plan for the coming years, I remain fully committed to keeping Brooklyn safe while strengthening community trust in the justice system. Working together with the communities we serve is part and parcel of achieving a smaller, more just system.

To that end, we will continue to find ways to empower community-based groups as partners in justice. This past December, we helped with planning the Brownsville Safety Alliance experiment, where the police stayed away from a number of commercial

blocks that came under the responsibility of local organizations. That week, during which no 911 calls were made, helped show that law enforcement does not have to be the default response in many cases. We are working on other programs in Brownsville, where there exists both a need and organizational infrastructure to test out new approaches.

Our plan also calls for continued re-examination of how to continue to reduce the reliance on enforcement responses and on incarceration. We will build on the success of my Post-Conviction Justice Bureau to undertake sentencing reviews throughout the Office, build relationships with prison groups to better understand those who have been serving long sentences and improve our re-entry services. We will also make better use of data to monitor the work of our prosecutors and to track misconduct complaints against police officers, thus enhancing accountability.

Much work remains to be done and, here in the DA's Office, it will be based on my conviction that a fairer criminal justice system and more involved communities result in greater public safety. I know that Brooklyn will come back stronger and ask for your continued partnership.

Have healthy, safe and blessed spring and summer seasons.

Eric Gonzalez

Ensuring Safer Streets for Pedestrians and Bicyclists

DA Gonzalez is determined to keep Brooklyn's streets safe from dangerous drivers who disobey the laws of the road and endanger the lives of others. That's why he created the Street Safety Bureau last summer to assist investigations of traffic violence cases, respond to scenes of serious collisions in real time and coordinate support services for victims and their families.

In early January, the Bureau secured its first indictment, charging a 21-year-old man with reckless manslaughter for fatally striking a 50-year-old father in front of the victim's family while allegedly speeding on the streets of Borough Park in July 2020.

"This horrific crash was no accident – it was a preventable crime



The defendant was allegedly driving over 60 miles per hour when he lost control of his Nissan 350Z and fatally struck the victim

that stemmed from reckless behavior before and during the collision," the DA declared when announcing the serious charges. "The defendant chose to drive a car he knew was not safe, allegedly sped on wet road conditions and took the life of a hard-working father."

The defendant was allegedly driving over 60 miles per hour in a 25 mile per hour zone on a wet road when he lost control of his Nissan 370Z and slammed into the victim, who had just walked his 6-year-old daughter from his minivan to the curb seconds before the collision. It is also alleged that, prior to the crash, a mechanic warned the defendant that his tires were dangerously worn out and that the defendant had a forged inspection sticker affixed to his vehicle's windshield.



Victim Jose Barrera with his daughter

The Street Safety Bureau was created to effectively prosecute cases of reckless and criminal driving and will continue to thoroughly investigate and prosecute motorists whose unlawful actions cause traffic fatalities or injuries. We will do all we possibly can to get justice for victims who are killed and maimed by drivers, support their families and work with our community to advocate for better enforcement and improved laws that protect cyclists and pedestrians.

Working with Communities to Get Guns Off the Streets

Over weekends in September 2020 and January 2021, our Office, together with the New York State Attorney General Tish James and the NYPD, held gun buyback events in East New York and Brownsville that resulted in a total of over 80 firearms being taken off the streets.

Gun buyback events provide up to \$250 in cash cards and iPads for each gun, including handguns, shotguns and assault rifles, turned in. The transactions are anonymous, no-questions-asked and no one is subject to arrest.

"Our gun buybacks don't just reduce the inventory of guns that are out there and can fall into the wrong hands, but also provide the community a chance to get involved and send the message that ending gun violence is up to all of us," DA Gonzalez said. "This program is one small part of my office's multi-pronged approach to reducing the shootings and making Brooklyn safer."

Buyback events remove guns from the homes of people who in many cases are reluctant to admit they own a firearm, are afraid of consequences to a family member if they report it or don't know how to safely dispose of



DA Gonzalez and NY Attorney General Tish James inspect one of the 48 firearms turned in at our most recent gun buyback in Brownsville

it. Guns, unfortunately, have a way of leaving homes and finding their way to the hands of children or adults who may pose a risk to themselves or others. They are also a factor in increases in suicides.

Last year's uptick in gun violence demands that our Office and partners in both law enforcement and the community work in tandem and use every tool in our arsenal. The success of our gun buyback events will continue to play a role in our strategy to create a safer, gun-free Brooklyn.



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Targeting Alleged Gun Trafficking Ring

Our multi-pronged efforts to crack down on gun violence resulted in a major recent successful takedown of an alleged gun trafficking ring that purchased firearms in South Carolina and Virginia that were then transported on the Iron Pipeline to be sold on the streets of Brooklyn.

The 139-count indictment, announced at the end of 2020, charged four men: an alleged long-time Brownsville gun merchant, a subway conductor from Flatlands who allegedly purchased weapons down south, and alleged traffickers from South Carolina and Virginia.

Bringing these defendants to justice required an extensive, dangerous year-long investigation between



Weapons of war, transported by gun traffickers from down south, have no place in our communities

October 2019 and October 2020. During that time, undercover detectives purchased 44 firearms, including two assault weapons, during 27 controlled gun buys a block away from one of the alleged ringleader's Brownsville home.

This case is an example of DA Gonzalez's focus on eliminating illegal guns from the streets of Brooklyn by targeting those responsible for their proliferation. We will do all we can to keep these weapons out of dangerous hands and hold those who provide them accountable.



NYPD detectives purchased 44 firearms, including two assault weapons, during their yearlong undercover operation

Safeguarding Brooklyn's Senior Citizens

Our Office is committed to protecting our senior citizens from scammers and fraudsters who seek to take advantage of them. In December of last year, our Office indicted a Bronx man for allegedly scamming numerous senior citizens out of thousands of dollars in a scheme where victims were falsely told that a grandchild of theirs had been arrested and needed cash to be bailed out of jail.

Between March 2019 and March 2020, the defendant allegedly targeted at least eight grandparents between the ages of 74 and 90. The victims lived across Brooklyn, including Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, Clinton Hill, Bushwick, Brownsville and Marine Park. Each lost between \$3,000 and nearly \$20,000 because of the scam.

In each case, the victims allegedly received a phone call from an individual who claimed to be an attorney and said that the victim's grandchild was arrested and being held in jail. The victims were told to provide cash in an envelope to bail out their grandchild and that a messenger working for the attorney would come to the victim's home to pick up the envelope. The defendant, who allegedly worked as a dispatcher, then sent a courier to pick up the envelope and deliver it to him.



The DA meeting with seniors in Clinton Hill

"Be wary of any phone calls from strangers asking for cash," DA Gonzalez advised. "Never agree to turn over money without contacting your grandchild, their parent or another relative to determine if they are safe, and report any suspicious solicitation to law enforcement."

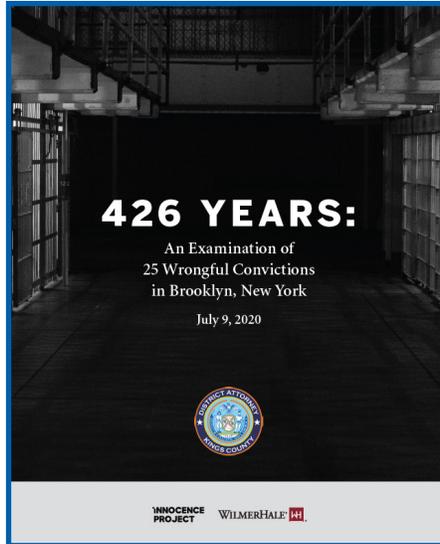
During the coronavirus pandemic, our Office has seen a proliferation of scams seeking to take advantage of people's fears and confusion. The dedicated prosecutors of our Frauds Bureau are working tirelessly to stay a step ahead of these schemes and ensure Brooklyn's citizens are kept safe.

Learning From Wrongful Convictions

Since the release last summer of the “426 Years” wrongful convictions report – an unprecedented study that analyzes the circumstances behind and the reasons for overturning the first 25 wrongful convictions investigated by our Office’s Conviction Review Unit (CRU) – the critical effort to correct miscarriages of justice in Brooklyn has continued in earnest.

In October 2020, the CRU moved to vacate the 29th conviction since its work began in 2014. The defendant, Gerard Domond, was incarcerated for 29 years after getting convicted for a 1987 murder following a trial that relied on a sole eyewitness whose psychiatric issues were not disclosed to the defense and unfairly prejudiced the defendant.

Vacating Domond’s conviction highlights the fact that even in cases that are very old and difficult to investigate, our CRU will do all it can to correct the error and ensure justice.



The 426 Years report, published in July 2020, provides an unprecedented look at the circumstances behind and reasons for overturning wrongful convictions

Brooklyn’s CRU is recognized as a national model for other prosecutors’ offices. By openly sharing the methods, analyses and findings in “426 Years” — the combined time the 25 people who were exonerated spent in prison — we can flesh out the common factors that lead to wrongful convictions and avoid these injustices from happening in the future, not just here in Brooklyn but throughout the country.

“Wrongful convictions devastate lives – each one of the 25 cases in this Report is its own tragedy – and strike at the heart of our criminal justice system,” DA Gonzalez said.

An article about the study, which was created together with the Innocence Project and the law firm WilmerHale, was featured on the cover of the American Bar Association’s Criminal Justice Magazine and the report has been discussed in a number of webinars and educational events.

Protecting Homeowners from Real Estate Fraud

Brooklyn’s valuable real estate market remains an attractive target for fraudsters willing to deceive homeowners and we remain vigilant in our efforts to protect them.

In December 2020, our Office charged a suspended Brooklyn attorney with stealing the deeds to eight properties in foreclosure worth a total of \$7.8 million by defrauding seven homeowners, most of whom believed he was negotiating a short sale on their behalf.



DA Gonzalez addresses a town hall in East New York to help protect homeowners from real estate fraud

“Stealing someone’s home is one of the worst things you can do to a person,” said DA Gonzalez. “These victims, who trusted the defendant to help them avoid foreclosure, instead had their homes stolen and were left facing financial ruin.”

Between May 2012 and November 2020, victims contacted the defendant to negotiate a short sale, i.e., selling the property to someone else under terms communicated to and approved by a lender. In exchange, the lender would then drop the foreclosure action and forgive the loan amount owed.

The defendant allegedly met most of the victims at his office in Borough Park where he either falsely told victims that they were required to sign their deeds over to him for the defendant to begin a short sale negotiation or had the victims sign documents that the defendant claimed were part of the short sale process but, unbeknownst to them, actually relinquished ownership of their property to the defendant.

In most cases, the defendant allegedly paid the owner’s fee, ranging from \$1,000 to \$18,000, for transferring the property to him or to various corporations he controlled. In some cases, the defendant allegedly told the victims that the lenders preferred or, on at least one occasion, required that the homeowners vacate the property for the short sale to occur.

There is no record of the defendant attempting to negotiate a short sale with any of the lenders on the properties, despite the federal and state laws that require lenders to make a record of any short sales or attempts to negotiate a short sale. The defendant allegedly collected over \$600,000 in rent from tenants he brought in or existing tenants at the eight properties the victims transferred to him.

As a result of this scheme, the victims, who owned homes in Bedford Stuyvesant, Ocean Hill, Cypress Hills, Flatbush and East New York, lost their properties and rental income. In addition, their credit scores and ability to obtain new loans rapidly deteriorated as most of the foreclosures remain active.

Our Real Estate Fraud Unit has kept a close eye on Brooklyn’s housing market as fraudsters’ schemes grow increasingly complicated and home values continue to rise. If you are considering selling your home, be wary of any unsolicited offers of help with your property and do not sign any documents unless you consult with an independently retained attorney.



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DA Staffers in New Management Positions

The appointments of these two dedicated law enforcement professionals bring valuable experience, diversity and leadership skills to our Trial Division.



James Lin

ADA James Lin has been leading the Green Zone Trial Bureau for the last couple of years, overseeing felony and misdemeanor cases in Coney Island, Brighton Beach, Sheepshead Bay, Sunset Park, Midwood, Flatbush and parts of Crown Heights.

A graduate of Hofstra University Law School, Lin began his legal career in the New York County District Attorney's Office, where he held a number of supervisory positions and served as a member of the Asian

Gang Unit and the Investigation Division Central Bureau, investigating white collar crimes. He joined our office in 2017 as Deputy Bureau Chief for the Supreme Court in the Grey Zone, where he became the point person on DNA evidence and supervised several felony hearings and trials.

In 2018 Lin moved to the Green Zone as its Supreme Court Deputy and was promoted to Bureau Chief in early 2019. An active member of the criminal justice legal community, he helped form the Prosecutors' Committee of the Asian American Bar Association of New York (AABANY) and is part of the New York State Advisory Committee on Criminal Law and Procedure.



Karla Watson

The December 2020 appointment of ADA Karla Watson to Chief of the Red Zone Trial Bureau, which handles criminal cases in East New York, Canarsie, Flatlands, Fort Greene, Marine Park and Mill Basin, ensures that members of those communities will have a tireless and dedicated advocate working on their behalf.

Watson, also a graduate of Hofstra University School of Law, joined our Office in 1999. As an ADA in our Trial and Domestic Violence Bureaus, she has indicted more than 100 felony cases and tried a wide variety of cases, including attempted murders, robberies, home invasions, serious assaults, and gun cases.

In 2014, she was promoted to Felony Deputy, supervising prosecutors in all aspects of case investigation, preparation and trial. She also investigates complaints in her role as EEO counselor and represents the Office at precinct council meetings. Her wealth of experience as a prosecutor will strengthen our Trial Division and make its leadership and management even more representative of the communities we serve.

Keeping Brooklyn Safe from Gang-Driven Violence (Continued from Page 1)

During a May 2019 shooting, a defendant fired multiple times into the Pulaski Playground, striking a 15-year-old victim in the thumb. During an October 2019 shooting, three of the defendants allegedly opened fire on rivals walking midday amid families and children on a busy commercial stretch of Graham Avenue, firing into store windows and narrowly missing the head of a shopkeeper. In June 2020, three of the defendants allegedly targeted a member of the rival Hoolies gang, fatally shooting the victim as he sat in the back of a livery cab. In September 2020, it is alleged that two of the defendants, wearing hoods and masks, murdered a rival during an ambush that also wounded two bystanders when one of them fired into a crowd. Similarly, in an October 2020 shooting, a defendant allegedly opened fire on a group of teenagers, striking a 14-year-old girl in the leg.

Violence like this, fueled by senseless rivalries between crews from neighboring territories or housing complexes, occurs throughout Brooklyn and is responsible for much of the gun violence we are contending with. Unfortunately, for many of these young men, some of whom adopted the names of famous basketball players to signify their status as shooters, firing at rivals, or "spinning" in gang lingo, is a deadly game.

It is alleged that incarcerated 900 members communicated with non-incarcerated members in jail phone calls to keep up to date or discuss violent acts and that defendants used

social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, to demonstrate their gang membership and broadcast gang activity. They allegedly also posted music videos to YouTube containing song lyrics referencing the status of rivalries and referring to acts of violence committed by gang members.

This disturbing disregard for human life has no place in Brooklyn. That's what makes takedowns so critical to our efforts — when defendants responsible for multiple acts of violence are charged in these indictments there's a multiplying effect as we hold them accountable for serious crimes that keep them off the streets for years to come.

Our Office and partners in law enforcement will continue to invest the time and resources to build these complicated cases and keep our communities safe from these drivers of crime, but it is going to take a community-wide effort to stop this violence. We are determined to take shooters off our streets and to work with our communities to speak out against senseless gun violence, assist our investigations and protect vulnerable young people.

We are confident that these types of investigations will make a meaningful difference for the safety of the people of Brooklyn and contribute to a safer year ahead.

Uplifting Our Neighbors in Need

Over the course of a year of unprecedented and unforeseen challenges, our Office hosted over 40 food and PPE distribution events to support vulnerable members of our community struggling with food insecurity and economic hardship.

These included a Thanksgiving food drive that helped deliver groceries, hot meals and turkeys to grace the tables of families across Brooklyn, regular food distributions to homebound seniors in public housing and the delivery of masks, gloves and hand sanitizer throughout the borough.

We are proud of the work so many members of our Office and community partners have undertaken, working in unison to lend a helping hand to their neighbors in need. Brooklyn stands united during these difficult times. We will get through them together.



The DA's Office in the Community



Honoring the memories of lives lost to homicides and supporting victims' loved ones on the National Day of Remembrance



Giving back to our community alongside local faith and community groups to distribute toys and spread holiday cheer to children in need



Lighting the Hanukkah Menorah outside Borough Hall, a time-honored tradition that reminds us that darkness can never overcome light



Celebrating the Independence Day of Pakistan with Brooklyn's vibrant and growing Pakistani-American Community



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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, immigrant 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 help resolve all matters.

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:

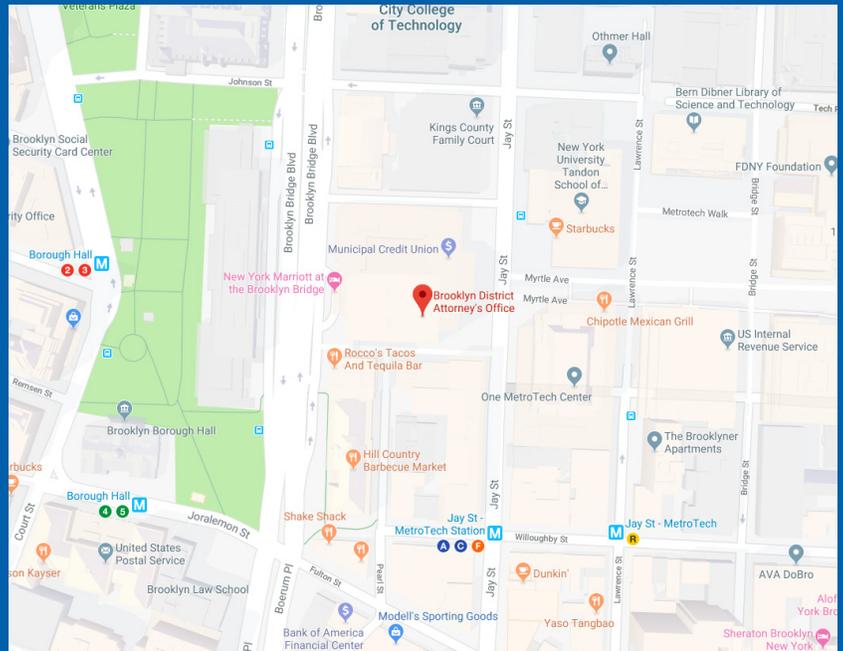
(718) 250-2340

(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