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QUEENS COUPLE CHARGED WITH GRAND LARCENY;
DEFENDANTS ALLEGEDLY FILED FRAUDULENT SUPERSTORM SANDY CLAIMS

*Fake Lease Agreements And Receipts Allegedly Submitted To Collect FEMA Benefits;
Defendants Face Up To Seven Years In Prison If Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by New York City Department of Investigation (DOI) Commissioner Mark G. Peters, today announced that a Howard Beach husband - and FDNY Firefighter - has been charged with grand larceny, and his wife additionally charged with forgery and other crimes, for filing bogus FEMA claims to collect more than \$25,000 in Superstorm Sandy benefits.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendants are alleged to having tried to take advantage of a system established to help people who face real crises following a natural disaster. The aftermath of Superstorm Sandy on October 29, 2012, devastated many residents of Queens County and beyond, resulting in many homes being damaged and in some cases destroyed. Those storm victims deservedly needed assistance in rebuilding their homes and their lives. The two defendants in this case are alleged to have lied, fabricated documents and receipts to dupe FEMA into giving them funds to feed their own greed. The defendants must be held accountable for their alleged actions."

DOI Commissioner Peters said, "As charged, these two defendants tried to turn a disaster into personal profit, stealing public funds that could have gone to those New Yorkers who lost their homes in Hurricane Sandy. That one of the defendants is a City firefighter now charged with bilking the public trust only underscores the troubling nature of this investigation. DOI worked with, and will continue to work with, our law enforcement partners to expose and stop these crimes."

The District Attorney identified the defendants as FDNY Firefighter Christopher Poje, 43, and his wife Margaret Poje, 39, of 86th Street in the Howard Beach section of Queens. The defendants are awaiting arraignment in Queens Criminal Court on two separate complaints charging both defendants with third-degree grand larceny. Margaret Poje is additionally charged with second-degree forgery, second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument and first-degree offering a false instrument for filing. If convicted, both defendants face up to seven years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, Margaret Poje filed a claim with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on November 11, 2012, in which she stated her primary residence was 157-32 89th Street in Howard Beach, Queens, which in fact is a secondary property owned by Margaret Poje and her brother. As a result of damage from Superstorm Sandy, Margaret Poje claimed she had to move to an apartment on West 82nd Street in Manhattan. The defendant allegedly submitted a lease agreement as well as rental receipts and attached a \$3,800 invoice from a

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heating and cooling company for home repairs for the 89th Street property. FEMA reimbursed Margaret Poje a total of \$19,556 in benefits.

According to the complaints, said District Attorney Brown, the lease and rent receipts allegedly submitted to FEMA by Margaret Poje contained the signature of a realtor, who was Margaret Poje's co-worker at a local real estate agency. The realtor was interviewed by an investigator on July 10, 2013, and stated the apartment listed on the documents does not exist, and furthermore, he stated that he did not sign the lease or rent receipts.

District Attorney Brown continued that, according to the complaints, defendant Margaret Poje submitted a 1099 tax form (to report income other than salary) that allegedly states her residence as 157-06 86th Street in Howard Beach, and a tenant of the defendant's who previously lived at the 86th Street property told an investigator that both Margaret and Christopher Poje had also lived at the 86th Street address before and on October 29, 2012, the day Superstorm Sandy struck. FEMA funds were only available to residents whose primary residence was damaged by the storm.

According to the criminal complaints, District Attorney Brown continued, the \$3,800 invoice for repairs on the 89th Street property had been allegedly altered by defendant Margaret Poje. The owner of the heating and cooling company told an investigator that his company did perform work for the Poes, but on the 86th Street property - not at the 89th Street address.

Furthermore, said District Attorney Brown, the criminal complaints allege that defendant Christopher Poje submitted a separate FEMA claim on November 11, 2012, for reimbursement for temporary housing following Superstorm Sandy. The defendant allegedly attached a lease agreement and two months' receipts for an apartment on East 37th Street in Manhattan. Defendant Christopher Poje received \$6,526 in benefits from FEMA.

District Attorney Brown said, according to the complaints, the person named on the documents as the owner of the rental property is in fact the brother of defendant Margaret Poje, who allegedly admitted to an investigator that she had signed his name to the document. Furthermore, the manager of the Manhattan apartment building where Christopher Poje allegedly claimed to have leased told an investigator that the space had been occupied by two other individuals between September 1, 2012, and August 21, 2013. Defendant Margaret Poje also allegedly stated to an investigator that she generated the rental receipts and the lease for the East 37th Street apartment.

The investigation was conducted Deputy Inspector General Tiffany Ingraham, of the Department of Investigation with the assistance of the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, under the supervision of Special Agent in Charge of the Philadelphia Field Office, Gregory K. Null.

Senior Assistant District Attorney Theresa E. Smith, of District Attorney Brown's Integrity Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys James M. Liander, Bureau 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 a complaint is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editor: An e-version of this press release is posted on QDA website at www.queensda.org