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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Chef Turned Restaurant Consultant Indicted for Allegedly Stealing
More Than \$14,000 From Owners of Bay Ridge Eatery**
Defendant Allegedly Faked Violations and Documentation to Steal Money

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez and New York City Department of Investigation Commissioner Margaret Garnett today announced that a 36-year-old man has been arraigned on an indictment in which he is charged with grand larceny, criminal possession of a forged instrument and falsifying business records for stealing more than \$14,000 from a Bay Ridge restaurant after falsely claiming it had numerous violations.

District Attorney Gonzalez said, “The victims in this case worked hard to make their restaurant a success and this defendant, claiming he could help them, allegedly lied and stole their hard-earned money instead. I am committed to protecting small businesses, which are an important part of our communities, from fraudsters such as this defendant.”

Commissioner Garnett said, “This defendant falsified City documents to continually shake down a local small business for thousands of dollars in cash, according to the charges. Forging official City documents is a crime and DOI will continue to pursue individuals who attempt to use fake records to take advantage of unwitting New Yorkers. DOI thanks OATH for referring the original complaint that led to today’s arrest and the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office for its prosecution of this alleged conduct.”

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Vincent Tropepe, 36, of Bay Ridge. He was arraigned today before Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice Guy Mangano on a 41-count indictment in which he is charged with 19 counts of second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument, 20 counts of first-degree falsifying business records, one count of third-degree grand larceny, and one count of third-degree attempted grand larceny. He was released without bail and ordered to return to court on April 17, 2019. He faces up to seven years in prison if convicted of the top count.

The District Attorney said that, according to the investigation, the defendant, who holds himself out to be a restaurant consultant, was employed as a registered representative by the Yemen Café, located at 7130 Fifth Avenue in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, to appear at the Office of

Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH) to advocate on its behalf. The defendant also consulted and trained kitchen staff in proper food handling practices.

Between July 13, 2018 and August 18, 2018, according to the investigation, the defendant claimed he had discovered delinquent violations at OATH, appeared before a judge and negotiated lower fines, paid the fines from his business account and saved the Café from closure. He gave the owners of the Café fraudulent paperwork, including notices of appearance, that he claimed to have received from OATH, claiming that the restaurant owed thousands of dollars in fines for delinquent violations.

On July 13, 2018, he demanded to be reimbursed and he was given \$2,570 by the owners. On August 13, 2018, the defendant demanded an additional \$11,650, claiming he laid out that amount to pay fines on the Café's behalf, and presented the owners with additional paperwork stating higher fines were owed. The owners gave the defendant that money as well.

The owners became suspicious of the validity of the violations and went to OATH to determine if the fines were legitimate. OATH determined that the documents presented by the defendant were fraudulent and the alleged fines and violations were fabricated. OATH reported the incident to DOI for investigation. Finally, the defendant allegedly sought additional payment from the Café in December 2018, presenting them with more fraudulent documents and fabricated violations. However, the owners did not give him any money.

The case was investigated by DOI's Office of the Inspector General for OATH, specifically Assistant Inspector General Trenton Sweeney, under the supervision of Inspector General Eleonora Rivkin, Associate Commissioner Andrew Brunsten, Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Investigations Dominick Zarrella, and First Deputy Commissioner Daniel Cort.

The case is being prosecuted by Senior Assistant District Attorney Adam Libove, of the District Attorney's Public Integrity Unit, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Michel Spanakos, Chief of the Public Integrity Unit, and the overall supervision of Assistant District Attorney Patricia McNeill, Chief of the District Attorney's Investigations Division.

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An indictment is an accusatory instrument and not proof of a defendant's guilt.