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QUEENS BUSINESS OWNER CHARGED WITH BILKING EMPLOYEES
OUT OF MORE THAN \$1.5 MILLION IN WAGES

*Defendant Awarded Millions in Contracts to Upgrade City Schools;
Allegedly Submitted Faked Payroll to Pocket Cash; Nearly a Dozen Victims Cheated*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz, along with the New York City Department of Investigation Commissioner Margaret Garnett, announced today that a Queens County grand jury has indicted a business owner and his company, Laser Electrical Contracting Inc., of grand larceny, failure to pay prevailing wages, scheme to defraud and other crimes for underpaying employees assigned to work on public works projects in New York City public schools. From 2014 through 2018, the defendants had contracts with the New York City School Construction Authority and the New York City Department of Education worth millions to do electrical work in City schools.

District Attorney Katz said, “This business owner allegedly bilked his hard-working employees out of more than \$1.5 million in wages. Thanks to a number of employees coming forward to report the alleged wrong-doing, the matter was investigated and 11 workers in all were allegedly cheated. The defendant will be held accountable for this alleged malfeasance.”

Commissioner Garnett said, “Workers on government projects must be fairly compensated for their labor and paid the prevailing wage. These defendants underpaid employees through a variety of schemes, including falsely inflating the hourly rate paid, failing to pay benefits, and then submitting hundreds of materially false certified payroll reports to the New York City School Construction Authority and the City Department of Education, resulting in the theft of more than \$1.5 million in workers’ wages, according to the charges and court documents. This kind of criminal behavior is a priority for DOI because it exploits workers, wastes government money, and harms competing businesses who are playing by the rules. DOI thanks the Queens District Attorney’s Office for its partnership on this matter.”

The Queens District Attorney’s Office identified the defendant as Jagdeep Deol, 36, of 262nd Street in Glen Oaks, Queens, and his company Laser Electrical Contracting Inc. The defendant is charged in a 66-count indictment with grand larceny in the second degree, failure to pay prevailing wages, scheme to defraud in the first degree, offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree and falsifying business records in the first degree. The defendant was arraigned yesterday before Queens Supreme Court Justice Barry S. Kron who released the defendant on his own recognizance and ordered him to return to court on April 6, 2020. If convicted, Deol faces a minimum of probation to up to 15 years in prison.

According to the charges, said District Attorney Katz, the defendant had numerous public works contracts with the SCA and the DOE and additionally worked as a subcontractor for the SCA. For the time period of 2014 through 2018, under all the contracts the defendant failed to pay at least 11 employees the proper prevailing wage totaling more than \$1.5 million.

Continuing, according to the charges, said DA Katz, in February 2018 a number of employees reported that they had allegedly been underpaid. An investigation followed with reviews of payroll records and interviews with employees. It was determined that the workers' checks were missing a sum totaling more than \$1.5 million.

The DA added that, according to the charges, the defendant and the company submitted hundreds of payment requisitions that had been falsified.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Robert Magrino of the New York City Police Department's Asset Forfeiture Unit, under the supervision of Sergeant Adam Bruno, Lieutenant Alfred Batelli, and under the overall supervision of Assistant Chief Christopher McCormack, Commanding Officer-Criminal Enterprise Division.

The investigators who worked on this matter at the New York City Department of Investigation's Office of the Inspector General for the New York City School Construction Authority are: Deputy Counsel Celeste Sharpe, Investigative Accountant Raymond Dowd, Investigator Leonard Rein, Investigative Manager Charles Shevlin, Assistant Inspector General Nicholas Scicutella, under the supervision of Inspector General Felice Sontupe. DOI would like to thank the New York City School Construction Authority for their cooperation and assistance, especially the Labor Law Compliance Unit, and its Senior Director, Deborah Seidenberg, Investigative Accountant Emilio Serrano, and Investigators Agnes Collazo and Adam Gilyard. In addition, DOI thanks the New York City Department of Education, Division of Enterprise Purchasing and Division of School Facilities.

Assistant District Attorneys Priya Ravishankar and Samantha Kapelman, of the District Attorney's Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Senior Assistant District Attorneys Rebecca Height, Allison Wright, Supervisor, and under the overall supervision of Assistant District Attorney Christina Hanophy, Bureau Chief, along with the assistance of Senior Assistant District Attorney David Zadnoff, of the District Attorney's Special Proceedings Bureau under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Anthony Communiello.

It should be noted that an indictment is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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