



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

JOCELYN E. STRAUBER
COMMISSIONER

180 MAIDEN LANE
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212-825-5900

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**CONTACT: DIANE STRUZZI
ERIC LENKOWITZ
(212) 825-5931**

BROOKLYN RESTAURANT OWNER CHARGED WITH BRIBERY TO AVOID HEALTH CODE VIOLATIONS

Jocelyn E. Strauber, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation (“DOI”), announced the arrest of BADRI BRAUNZBOURG, the owner of Argo Restaurant in Brooklyn, NY, on bribery charges. According to the criminal complaint and DOI’s investigation, BRAUNZBOURG gave a \$300 cash bribe to a DOI undercover investigator posing as a Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (“DOHMH”) inspector, so that the inspector would ignore multiple Health Code violations observed at the restaurant. This was a joint investigation with the Office of Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez, and was prompted by a report to DOI from a City DOHMH inspector who was offered and declined a bribe while inspecting the Argo restaurant. The Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office is prosecuting this case.

DOI Commissioner Jocelyn E. Strauber said, “As charged, this restaurant owner was more concerned with dodging health code violations than with the safety of his customers. Rather than remediate the vermin violations in his eatery, the defendant tried to bribe his way out of them. I commend the City DOHMH Inspector who reported the bribe attempt, and thank the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for their commitment to preventing acts of bribery that threaten public health and safety.”

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said, “Health inspections of restaurants ensure sanitary conditions and the safety of customers. This defendant, instead of correcting violations in his establishment, allegedly tried to bribe the inspector – corrupting the process and potentially endangering the public. This prosecution sends a strong message that bribing a public official will not be tolerated in our city, and I thank DOI and DOHMH for their partnership to keep the people of Brooklyn safe and healthy.”

Health Commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasani said, “Public health must be rooted in fairness to be seen as legitimate,” said Health Commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasani. “Attempts to corrupt our processes can undermine health itself. Our staff are heroes and our inspectors won’t be bought. We’re proud of this inspector who called the authorities to hold this establishment accountable.”

BRAUNZBOURG, 57, of Brooklyn NY, was arrested on February 7, 2023, and charged with Bribery in the Third Degree, a class D felony, and Giving Unlawful Gratuities, a class A misdemeanor. Upon conviction, a class D felony is punishable by up to seven years’ incarceration, while a class A misdemeanor is punishable by up to one year’s incarceration. BRAUNZBOURG was arraigned and released on his own recognizance. His next court date is scheduled for April 18, 2022.

According to the criminal complaint, on December 2, 2022, a DOI undercover investigator, posing as a DOHMH inspector, conducted an inspection of Argo Restaurant. The undercover investigator observed multiple violations, including uncovered garbage cans, dead cockroaches, mouse droppings and failure to post the Restaurant’s “C” letter grade card. The undercover investigator informed BRAUNZBOURG about the Health Code violations and the defendant offered cash to the undercover investigator in exchange for not reporting the

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violations. BRAUNZBOURG was captured on undercover video and audio footage removing currency from his pocket and counting it, and then offering the investigator a \$200 cash “tip” for not reporting the violations. BRAUNZBOURG then increased the offer to \$300, saying, “I give you \$300, make it nice, do not give me more violations. Help me out please, do something, whatever you can do,” as alleged in the criminal complaint. Per the complaint, BRAUNZBOURG then handed the undercover inspector \$300 in cash.

Commissioner Strauber thanked Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez and his staff for their collaboration on this investigation and prosecution, which was handled by Assistant District Attorney Sara Walshe, Deputy Bureau Chief Adam Libove, and Chief of the Public Integrity Bureau Laura Neubauer. Commissioner Strauber also thanked DOHMH Commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasani and his staff for their cooperation.

The investigation was conducted by DOI’s Office of the Inspector General for DOHMH; Confidential Investigator Daniel Mares, supervised by Assistant Inspector General Shakina Griffith, First Deputy Inspector General Mary Kozlow, Inspector General Clinton Daggan, Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Investigations Dominick Zarrella, and First Deputy Commissioner Daniel G. Cort. DOI’s NYPD Detective Squad assisted with the investigation.

A criminal complaint is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country and New York City’s corruption watchdog. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City. DOI’s strategy attacks corruption comprehensively through systemic investigations that lead to high-impact arrests, preventive internal controls and operational reforms that improve the way the City runs.

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