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3 Individuals Arrested and Indicted on Staten Island for Allegedly Operating Cocaine Ring Inside Hotel Where Fatal Overdoses Occurred

Long term investigation into overdoses inside the Richmond Hotel resulted in takedown of drug dealing ring

Staten Island, N.Y. — Richmond County District Attorney Michael E. McMahon today announced that three individuals have been arrested and indicted for allegedly selling large quantities of cocaine on Staten Island. The long-term investigation between RCDA and the NYPD was initiated in response to the numerous Overdose Response Investigations that have been linked to the Richmond Hotel located at 71 Central Avenue, including three fatal and three non-fatal overdoses this year. All three defendants have been charged with varying degrees of criminal sale of a controlled substance for allegedly selling cocaine inside the hotel. A fourth individual was also arrested and indicted during the course of the investigation for possessing an illegal firearm outside the location.

District Attorney Michael E. McMahon said, “Our long-term overdose response investigation into the overdoses that were reported inside this hotel led my office and the NYPD to uncover a drug dealing ring operating from within. These defendants allegedly used their hotel rooms as de facto drug houses, but they were not able to evade law enforcement for long. We are now working with our partner agencies to ensure illegal activity does not resume at this location, and we will continue to double our efforts to prosecute and hold accountable those who peddle this poison in our communities. With an increase in overall deaths and overdoses being reported on Staten Island according to the latest data from DOHMH, we must not allow our communities to be overrun and held hostage by nefarious actors who endanger the lives of others and prey on those suffering from addiction illness.”

Defendants James Williams, 42, and Andre Williams, 36, were arraigned on separate indictments on charges of Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the Second Degree and related crimes. Defendant Willie Lewis, 38, was arraigned on an indictment on charges of Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the Third Degree and related crimes. Defendant Rhasheen Pegus, 41, was previously indicted and arraigned separately on charges of Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Second Degree for possessing a 9mm Luger caliber semi-automatic pistol outside the hotel location on November 3, 2021.

The investigation, “Operation Late Check Out,” began in April 2021 after numerous reports of overdoses occurring at the Richmond Hotel located at 71 Central Ave were received, including three fatal and three non-fatal between April and August 2021. According to the indictment, the defendants allegedly sold cocaine to undercover officers

on numerous occasions. A search warrant executed during the course of the investigation in one of the hotel rooms where defendant James Williams allegedly resided yielded quantities of cocaine and methamphetamine.

These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Matthew Gamberg and Carrie Low, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Michele Molfetta, Chief of the Narcotics-Investigations Bureau.

The charges contained in the indictment are merely allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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