



The City of New York
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Release #21-2013
nyc.gov/html/doi

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2013**

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STATEMENT OF DOI COMMISSIONER ROSE GILL HEARN ON DOI'S INVESTIGATION OF AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO CORRUPT CITY OFFICIALS

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), issued the following statement regarding a DOI investigation that exposed a business owner's unsuccessful attempt to corrupt City officials. The investigation showed that the business owner undertook renovations to convert a large warehouse into a 30,000 square-foot rock-climbing gym to be called "The Cliffs at Long Island City" without obtaining the proper permit from the City's Department of Buildings ("DOB"). An unannounced DOB inspection on April 9, 2013 resulted in DOB's issuance of a Stop Work Order ("SWO"). The next day, the business owner contacted a City Council member's office, requesting that the member intervene with DOB and offering the business's "unconditional support" for the Council member's election campaign. The Council Member reported the matter to the City Council's General Counsel, who notified DOI. DOI immediately opened an investigation, which included the introduction of two DOI undercover investigators posing, respectively, as a member of the Council member's staff and a DOB inspector. The investigators recorded their meetings and contacts with the business owner.

Within four weeks DOI completed the investigation and referred its findings to DOB Commissioner Robert LiMandri for any necessary regulatory action and to the office of Queens County District Attorney Richard A. Brown, whose office accepted the referral for criminal prosecution. DOI's investigation revealed, among other things, that the business owner offered various forms of assistance to promote the Council member's campaign and, according to the criminal complaint, paid money, totaling \$1,094, on two occasions to a DOI undercover investigator posing as DOB inspector in exchange for the investigator's agreement to rescind the SWO.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "We're grateful that at a time when some people are succumbing to corruption, this was reported to DOI. The swift investigation allows DOB to address the construction issues and the prosecutors to proceed with the criminal case. Cutting corners illegally and paying off City employees is not acceptable."

DOI investigators arrested the business owner, Michel G. Wolfert, 38, of Croton on Hudson, NY, on May 17, 2013. Mr. Wolfert is charged with Bribery in the Third Degree, a class D felony, and Unlawful Continuance, an unclassified misdemeanor. A class D felony is punishable on conviction by up to seven years imprisonment and an unclassified misdemeanor is punishable by a fine up to \$25,000 and up to a year's incarceration.

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanked the City Council member, the City Council, DOB, and the Queens District Attorney's Office for their assistance.

The investigation was conducted by DOI's Office of the Inspector General for DOB.

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. The agency investigates and refers for prosecution City employees and contractors engaged in corrupt or fraudulent activities or unethical conduct. 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.

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