



**The City of New York
Department of Investigation**

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Release #002-2003
nyc.gov/html/doi

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, February 20, 2003

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DOI ARRESTS FOUR WHO TRIED TO BRIBE CITY BUILDINGS INSPECTORS

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), announced today the arrests of four individuals who tried to bribe inspectors from the City's Department of Buildings (DOB). The arrests are part of an ongoing investigation of professional architects and contractors resulting from a number of complaints from DOB employees who say they have been offered money to overlook buildings violations.

"I commend the DOB employees who reported these bribery attempts," said DOI Commissioner Gill Hearn. "Keeping the people of New York City safe is of paramount importance. One of the ways we can do that is to make sure buildings professionals don't skirt the law by bribing honest City employees who enforce the building codes that protect us."

"This is symbolic of a new era at DOB. We are interrupting the cycle of giving and taking bribes. We have sent a strong message of zero tolerance to our staff and now we are sending the same strong message to the industry and to the public. I am pleased and proud of the DOB's inspectors' forthright actions. Also, I very much appreciate DOI's diligence in pursuing these wrong-doers," said DOB Commissioner Patricia J. Lancaster, AIA.

Yesterday, Iser Ehrenfeld, a 54-year old Brooklyn auto repair shop manager, was arrested on bribery charges for offering \$200 to a buildings inspector so that the inspector would overlook the fact that the shop does not have the proper Certificate of Occupancy, said Commissioner Gill Hearn. If convicted, Ehrenfeld faces seven years in jail.

On Friday, February 14, DOI investigators arrested George Kelesidis, 44, of Astoria, Queens, for offering money on two occasions to a DOB employee so that the employee would not issue violations for his mixed-use property. Kelesidis faces up to seven years in jail if convicted of the bribery charges.

On Thursday, February 13, DOI investigators arrested architect, Ira Benlevi and a contractor/homeowner Hua Shan Chen in connection with the bribery of a building inspector. Benlevi, 58, of Holliswood, N.Y., and Chen, 49, of Brooklyn, offered money to a Buildings inspector in order to remove five violations during a Certificate of Occupancy inspection of a new, multi-family residence that Chen owned in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. One of the citations faulted the structure for inadequate ventilation of fresh air in the building's gas meter room, a potentially hazardous condition. On December 11, 2002 and December 13, 2002, at Benlevi's direction, Chen offered \$1,000 and \$500 respectively to a buildings inspector so that Chen could obtain a final Certificate of Occupancy for the building. The two men are each being charged with one count of bribery in the third degree, a class D felony. If convicted, they each face seven years in jail.

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanked DOB Commissioner Patricia J. Lancaster and her buildings inspectors for reporting the bribery offers.

These investigations were conducted by Robert Roach, DOI's Inspector General for DOB, Joseph Ferraro, DOI's Deputy Inspector General for DOB, and their staff, including Jennifer Cunillera, Derek Pieper, Joe Reda, and Eugenia Patrikis.

Assistant District Attorney Mark Hunter of the Kings County District Attorney's office in Brooklyn, will prosecute Ehrenfeld, Benlevi, Chen and Kelesidis.

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