



## Department of Investigation

### *Press Release*

Release #058-99

### **2 DRIVING SCHOOL INSTRUCTORS ARRESTED IN UNDERCOVER PROBE**

*"Defensive Driving" Certificates Sold To Taxi Applicants Without Required Training*

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 1999 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), together with DIANE McGRATH-McKECHNIE, Chairperson of the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), and RICHARD E. JACKSON, JR., Commissioner of the State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), today announced the felony arrest of EMMANUEL HLEAH and JOSEPH ABRAHAM, driving instructors employed by USA Training, Inc., a provider of defensive driving courses in Long Island City, Queens, for illegally selling Defensive Driving Certificates (DDC) to 2 DOI undercover agents, posing as TLC hack license applicants, without providing the mandatory training evidenced by the certificates.

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, TLC regulations require that all hack licensees attend and complete a DMV-certified defensive driving course. DOI initiated an investigation earlier this year after receiving allegations from the TLC and the public that two individuals were approaching taxi driver applicants at the TLC Long Island City licensing facility and offering to sell them DDCs without providing the required six-hour training, he said.

Following surveillance at the TLC facility, where applicants generally gathered outside and waited to be admitted for processing, HLEAH and ABRAHAM were identified as the individuals selling the fake DDCs. Thereafter, two DOI undercover investigators, posing as taxi driver applicants, approached HLEAH and ABRAHAM on two separate occasions and purchased DDCs for \$60 each without ever having attended a defensive driving training course. In fact, HLEAH and ABRAHAM told the undercover officers that, if TLC officials ever challenged them, they were to say that the training, which consisted of lectures and videotape presentations, had been given the day before.

According to the complaint filed in the case, HLEAH and ABRAHAM would, in furtherance of the scheme, submit applicants' driver information to DMV, via an intermediary, falsely stating that the applicant had successfully completed the State-mandated course.

Commissioner Kuriansky said, "These arrests should serve as a stern warning to the taxi industry that cheating is simply not worth the risk. We are constantly monitoring the City's taxi operations and using undercover 'stings' to catch the corrupt. Any hack license applicants who buy defensive driving certificates without taking the necessary training are recklessly putting their own lives and careers and those of their passengers in jeopardy."

Chairperson McGrath-McKechnie said, "I believe these arrests send a strong message that any illegal

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actions that threaten the integrity of the TLC driver licensing process will not be tolerated under any circumstances. I would like to thank Commissioner Kuriansky and his staff for their successful investigation of this matter."

Commissioner Jackson said, "Taxi drivers have a legal obligation to complete the defensive driving course for their own safety and the protection of their passengers. DMV will do all in its power to assist the Department of Investigation and the Taxi and Limousine Commission in ensuring that taxi drivers meet that obligation."

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his appreciation to William Devoe, Supervisory Investigator for DMV's Metro Frauds Unit of the Division of Field Investigations, and TLC Deputy Commissioner Joseph Midolo, in charge of its Uniformed Services Bureau, for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the investigation.

HLEAH, 31, of 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Flushing, Queens, and ABRAHAM, 48, of 141<sup>st</sup> Street, also in Flushing, have each been charged with Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, Issuing a False Certificate, and Conspiracy in the Fifth Degree. If convicted, they each face up to 4 years in prison. HLEAH and ABRAHAM are both instructors at USA Training, Inc., which is located at 29-09 Queens Plaza, Long Island City, New York.

The investigation was conducted by Felicia Mennin, DOI's Inspector General for TLC, and members of her staff -- including Deputy TLC Inspector General John McMahon, and Special Investigators Tim Crowe, Frank Smith, Yves Desire, and Steven Montague -- and TLC First Deputy Commissioner Joseph Giannetto. Assisting in the arrests were members of the DOI Investigative Squad, State DMV investigators, and members of the TLC Uniformed Services Bureau.

The Office of Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorney Daniel O'Leary is handling the prosecution under the direction of Assistant District Attorney James Liander, Deputy Chief of the District Attorney's Integrity Bureau.

Members of the public are reminded that a complaint is merely an accusation and is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial in which it is the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.