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**CITY EMPLOYEE CHARGED WITH POSING AS LICENSED ARCHITECT
AND SUBMITTING FORGED DOCUMENTS TO BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT**
Scheme Affects Over 150 Residential and Commercial Construction Projects Throughout City

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by State Education Commissioner Richard Mills, New York City Department of Investigation Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn and New York City Buildings Commissioner Patricia J. Lancaster, announced today that a New York City Department of Education employee has been charged with unlawfully representing himself as a licensed architect during the last four years and fraudulently submitting official documents bearing a bogus architect's stamp and his signature to the City's Building Department.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant is alleged to have preyed upon unsuspecting individuals who believed that they were working with a licensed architect who they paid to examine building plans and permit applications and related documentation. The defendant is alleged to have falsely certified the documents as having been reviewed by a licensed architect. His alleged conduct is both reprehensible and potentially dangerous. The case will be prosecuted vigorously and swiftly to ensure that the defendant never again has an opportunity to exploit trusting individuals in search of affordable architectural counsel."

New York State Education Commissioner Richard Mills said, "This indictment sends a clear message to those who impersonate licensed professionals. I applaud Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown and New York City Buildings Commissioner Patricia Lancaster for their coordination and cooperation with our Office of Professional Discipline in bringing about this indictment. Our staff continues this investigation working closely with the other team members to follow up other leads. Public protection is the number one priority of our Office of Professional Discipline."

Department of Investigation Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "Through this joint investigation we have been able to identify, investigate and now prosecute an individual who has attempted to circumvent City building regulations and, in the process, defraud members of the public who thought they had hired a licensed professional. This defendant's alleged scheme could have had dangerous consequences. Now, the Department of Buildings must audit and re-review and, where necessary, inspect the projects the defendant worked on to see if the projects comply with the City's building codes."

New York City Buildings Commissioner Patricia J. Lancaster, FAIA, expressed her gratitude to Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, the New York State Department of Education's Office of the Professions and the Department of Investigation for their diligence in exposing this sham, so that no other New Yorkers will be deceived by the defendant. "As an architect myself, I am keenly aware of New York State's rigorous criteria for becoming a licensed professional and the importance of protecting my seal so that no one can use it without my knowledge. I urge my colleagues to guard against this theft and to report the loss of a seal to the State Education Department. Also, I suggest that they periodically check the records of applications filed under their names in the Building Information System at www.nyc.gov/buildings, to make sure that those submissions are legitimate."

District Attorney Brown identified the defendant as James Arriaga, 51, 416 South Chelsea Road in White Plains, New York. He is employed by the New York City Department of Education in its construction unit. The defendant has been charged in a 133-count indictment with the crimes of Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, Forgery in the Second Degree, Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, Unauthorized Practice of a Profession and Unauthorized Use of a Professional Title. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison.

According to the indictment, the defendant, between April 1, 2001 and July 1, 2005, unlawfully practiced the profession of architecture by holding himself out as a licensed architect and by utilizing a bogus stamp and seal of an actual licensed architect to forge his certification on various official records that were ultimately filed with the New York City Department of Buildings. It is estimated that more than 150 individuals in every borough except Staten Island were defrauded by the defendant.

Earlier this week, on October 17, 2005, investigators with the New York State Department of Education's Office of Professional Discipline and New York City Department of Buildings accompanied investigators from the Queens District Attorney's New York State Police Squad in executing a court-authorized search warrant drafted by the District Attorney's Investigations Division at an apartment at 30-56 30th Street in Astoria, Queens, which was believed being used by the defendant, and seized documents evidencing unlicensed practice of architecture and false filings.

The Education Law requires that architects be licensed by the State Education Department. The unlicensed practice of architecture poses a substantial danger to the public who rely on licensed architects to professionally design and certify the construction to be done on their homes. The practice of architecture often includes vertical enhancements and modifications to older homes and new residences. Unlicensed practice can often result in poor design and construction that can result in tragic consequences.

The public can check professional licensing by calling the New York State Department of Education at 1-800-442-8106 or going to the Department's website at www.op.nysed.gov.

The defendant was arrested today by investigators assigned to the Queens District Attorney's New York State Police Squad. He is expected to be later today in the Supreme Court in Kew Gardens.

The investigation was conducted by the New York State Department of Education's Office of Professional Discipline (OPD) under the supervision of Director of Investigations Daniel J. Kelleher and Louis Catone, Director of OPD, and Investigators Lesley Higgins and Nikos Koutouratsas of the New York City Department of Buildings, Buildings Special Investigations Unit, under the supervision of Robert Roach, Inspector General for the Department of Buildings, and Dennis Curran, Special Inspector General, Department of Investigation. Assisting in the investigation was Investigator John Pratt of the New York State Police Queens District Attorney's Squad under the supervision of Senior Investigator Joel Downing under the overall supervision of Major Mark Smith, Commanding Officer of Troop NYC.

Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco is prosecuting the case.

It should be noted that an indictment is merely an accusation and that defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: E-version of press release is posted on www.queensda.org