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BRONX WOMAN INDICTED IN RENT SCAM THAT NETTED NEARLY \$100,000
Defendant Allegedly Promised 16 People Rent-Stabilized Apartments,
Likely Defrauded Dozens More, Preyed on Dominican Community

Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark today announced that a Bronx woman has been indicted for stealing approximately \$99,000 from 16 people in a scheme promising rent-stabilized apartments to low-income individuals.

District Attorney Clark said, “For months, in the middle of the pandemic, the defendant, Eligia Estrella, allegedly stole thousands of dollars from hard-working people who entrusted her with their savings to attain rent-stabilized apartments. She has been indicted for defrauding 16 people of about \$99,000, but it is believed she victimized as many as 63 people, stealing a total of approximately \$300,000.

“The victims, who include a grandmother and granddaughter, paid hefty deposits believing they would soon live in better conditions. To further gain the victims’ trust, the defendant allegedly told them she had connections with the city’s Housing Preservation and Development, the Housing Development Corporation, NYC Housing Authority and City Councilman Ruben Diaz, Sr. I thank DOI for assistance in this case. I would also like to thank Telemundo Channel 47 for directing victims to our Investigations Division.”

New York City Department of Investigation Commissioner Margaret Garnett said, “This defendant exploited the great need for affordable housing in this City and twice victimized 16 New Yorkers seeking affordable housing -- charging about \$99,000 in unnecessary broker fees without any ability to provide housing, leaving the victims poorer and still housing-insecure, according to the charges. If an affordable housing program uses brokers, it will be disclosed in the marketing materials. If you suspect you have been defrauded we urge you to call DOI at (212) 825-3502. DOI thanks the Bronx District Attorney’s Office and the NYPD for their partnership in exposing and stopping this fraud and HPD and HDC for their cooperation in this investigation.”

District Attorney Clark said the defendant, Eligia Estrella, 59, of East 172nd Street, the Bronx, was arraigned today before Bronx Supreme Court Justice Efrain Alvarado on a 66-count indictment



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charging third-degree Grand Larceny, third-degree Criminal Possession of Stolen Property, Petit Larceny, fifth-degree Criminal Possession of Stolen Property, first-degree Scheme to Defraud, and second-degree Scheme to Defraud. She is due back in court on December 14, 2021.

According to the investigation, between March 2020 and November 2020, Estrella told a friend that she could get her a rent-stabilized apartment, and allegedly said she had connections with organizations and city agencies, as well as Councilman Ruben Diaz Sr.'s office. The defendant said the cost to obtain the apartment was \$8,000 and that the victim had to pay \$4,000 up front and pay the remainder when the keys and lease were turned over.

Believing the defendant was helping her, the victim--who, like Estrella, is of Dominican heritage--told her friends and family members that Estrella was getting her a rent-stabilized apartment. They reached out to Estrella, trusted her, and told others about her as well. As charged in the indictment, 16 people had given Estrella deposits ranging from \$3,000 to \$16,000 for the apartments. After the victims paid the deposit, the defendant allegedly kept the money and the victims were never given the apartments.

The case is being prosecuted by Senior Investigative Assistant District Attorneys Miriam Bell-Blair and William Zelenka, and Assistant District Attorney Samantha Sizemore, all of the Investigations Division; under the supervision of Tarek Rahman, Deputy Chief of the Investigations Division, and Wanda Perez-Maldonado, Chief of the Investigations Division.

District Attorney Clark thanked BXDA Chief Investigator Frank J. Chiara, Deputy Chief Investigator Terence Mulderrig, Lieutenant Vincent Cantarella, Senior Detective Investigators Brian Santana, John Reilly, Steven Polizzi and Nicholas Cavalcanti; and Detective Investigator Anai Tamarez for their assistance in the investigation.

District Attorney Clark also thanked the NYPD Bronx Grand Larceny Squad, specifically Detective David Lee.

District Attorney Clark thanked DOI Special Investigator and Forensic Auditor Lana Wong, under the supervision of Deputy Inspector General Michael Morris and Senior Inspector General Jessica Heegan, for their assistance in the investigation.

An indictment is an accusatory instrument and not proof of a defendant's guilt.