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**For Immediate Release:**

March 24, 2020

**Office of The Attorney General**

- Gurbir S. Grewal, *Attorney General*

**Division of Criminal Justice**

- Veronica Allende, *Director*

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**Man Charged with Terroristic Threats for Allegedly Coughing on Food Store Employee and Telling Her He Has Coronavirus**



**TRENTON** – Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal announced that criminal charges were filed today against a man who allegedly coughed on a food store employee in Manalapan, N.J., and told the woman that he has the coronavirus.

**George Falcone, 50, of Freehold, N.J.**, was charged today by complaint-summons with the following criminal offenses:

- **Terroristic Threats** (3rd Degree)
- **Obstructing Administration of Law or Other Governmental Function** (4th degree)
- **Harassment** (Petty Disorderly Persons Offense)

The incident occurred at about 6:30 p.m. on Sunday, March 22, at the Wegmans on US Highway 9. The employee was concerned that Falcone was standing too close to her and an open display of prepared foods, so she requested that he step back as she covered the food. Instead, Falcone allegedly stepped forward to within 3 feet of her, leaned toward her, and purposely coughed. He allegedly laughed and said he was infected with the coronavirus. Falcone subsequently told two other employees they are lucky to have jobs.

A detective of the Manalapan Police Department was working a security detail at the store and approached Falcone, who allegedly refused to cooperate or provide his name or driver's license. After approximately 40 minutes, Falcone identified himself and was

permitted to leave. Following additional investigation, summonses were issued today which will require Falcone to appear in court at a later date.

The case will be prosecuted by the Division of Criminal Justice within the Attorney General's Office. Attorney General Grewal thanked the Manalapan Police Department and the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office for their strong response to the incident and investigation leading to today's charges.

"These are extremely difficult times in which all of us are called upon to be considerate of each other— not to engage in intimidation and spread fear, as alleged in this case," said Attorney General Grewal. "We must do everything we can to deter this type of conduct and any similar conduct that harms others during this emergency. Just as we are cracking down on bias offenses and those who use the pandemic to fuel hatred and prejudice, we vow to respond swiftly and strongly whenever someone commits a criminal offense that uses the coronavirus to generate panic or discord."

"Exploiting people's fears and creating panic during a pandemic emergency is reprehensible. In times like these, we need to find ways to pull together as a community instead of committing acts that further divide us," said Monmouth County Prosecutor Christopher J. Gramiccioni.

"I commend the officers and detectives involved in this case for bringing criminal charges against the individual responsible for causing additional stress to the employees and patrons of Wegmans during these unprecedented times," said Manalapan Police Chief Michael Fountain. "It sickens me to think an individual would lower their basic human standards during a time of crisis such as we are experiencing. As evident by these charges, law enforcement will not tolerate individuals breaking the law and placing others in fear during an already tense situation."

Third-degree charges carry a sentence of three to five years in state prison and a fine of up to \$15,000, while fourth-degree charges carry a sentence of up to 18 months in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000. Petty disorderly persons offenses carry a sentence of up to 6 months in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000.

The charges are merely accusations and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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**Defense Attorney:** Undetermined.

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