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**For Immediate Release:**

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**New Jersey State Police**

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**AG Grewal and Colonel Callahan Issue Weekly Round-Up on COVID-19 Enforcement Matters**

**TRENTON** – Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal and Colonel Patrick J. Callahan, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police, today announced enforcement actions from the past week, including coughing and spitting assaults, bias incidents and noteworthy violations of Governor Murphy’s Executive Orders. The Attorney General also announced enforcement actions targeting price-gouging and consumer fraud violations.

“We’re cracking down on those who jeopardize public health and undermine public safety,” said Attorney General Grewal. “We have zero patience for those who spit on cops, gouge prices, or try to exploit this pandemic for their personal gain.”

“Although law enforcement and medical professionals are on the frontlines of the battle against COVID-19, we are ultimately winning the war because of the extraordinary resolve and fortitude of New Jersey citizens who are doing their part day in and day out, abiding by the executive orders and sacrificing for the greater good,” said Colonel Patrick Callahan, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police. “Those who choose to ignore the law and selfishly place others at risk will face swift law enforcement action.”

**Assaults and Threats Against Police Officers, EMTs, or Others**

- **Jose A. Morales, Jr., 24, of Kearny, N.J.**, was charged with making terroristic threats during an emergency (2nd degree), aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer (3rd degree), and throwing bodily fluids (3rd degree) in Kearny the evening of May 16. Morales was also charged with receiving stolen property, a vehicle, in connection with the incident, and violating the emergency orders. When Morales was taken into custody by Kearny Police, he allegedly twice indicated that he had coronavirus and spat at a Kearny police officer.
- **Christopher G. Sabini, 20, of Elmwood Park, N.J.** was charged with a single count of making terroristic threats during an emergency (2nd degree) and three counts of aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer (4th degree) on May 15 after he allegedly fought with police responding to a domestic disturbance. During the incident, Sabini allegedly coughed on purpose in the direction of one officer while claiming he had coronavirus.
- **David S. Youssef, 31, of Cliffwood, N.J.**, was charged by the Aberdeen Township Police Department on May 18 with two counts of making terroristic threats during an emergency (2nd degree) (one for allegedly threatening to kill

certain relatives, and one for claiming to have COVID-19 and attempting to spit on officers), aggravated assault on an officer (3rd degree), resisting arrest (3rd degree), throwing bodily fluids at an officer (4th degree), endangering (4th degree), and harassment (petty disorderly persons offense). When police responded to a report of domestic violence, Youssef allegedly became combative and attempted to spit on officers, telling them he had COVID. He allegedly pushed and wrestled with officers during his arrest.

- **Marquise Cadet, 26, of Jackson, N.J.**, was charged on May 18 by the Jackson Police Department with terroristic threats during an emergency (2nd degree), aggravated assault on an officer (4th degree), resisting arrest (4th degree), providing false information to a law enforcement officer (4th degree), and obstruction (disorderly persons offense). Police responded to the Dollar General store at Manhattan Street Plaza because Cadet allegedly refused to wear a mask and was harassing customers. Cadet was uncooperative with police, and when they attempted to arrest him, he allegedly refused to provide a name and tried to flee. While at police headquarters, Cadet allegedly spit on an officer and told the officer he was COVID positive.
- **Randall Rivers, 53, of Gloucester Township, N.J.**, was charged by the Gloucester Township Police on May 21 with terroristic threats during an emergency (2nd degree), resisting arrest (3rd degree), and disorderly conduct (petty disorderly persons offense). When police responded to a domestic dispute involving Rivers, he allegedly shouted profanities at them. As the officers arrested him for disorderly conduct, Rivers allegedly fought with them and kicked an officer. He allegedly told officers he had COVID-19 as he coughed on them and got his blood on them.

#### **Other Criminal Charges Involving Indictable Offenses**

- **Jose Ruiz, 51, of Jersey City, N.J.**, was charged on May 15 with making terroristic threats during an emergency (2nd degree), aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer (3rd degree), throwing bodily fluids at an officer (3rd degree) and violating the emergency orders after he was arrested by the Jersey City Police for allegedly committing three separate armed robberies in Jersey City. At the time of his arrest, Ruiz allegedly asked police how they could be sure he was not infected with the coronavirus. Questioned further, he allegedly told police they would find out shortly and spit in an officer's face. In connection with the three armed robberies, Ruiz was charged with three counts of robbery (1st degree), unlawful possession of a weapon (gun, two counts, 2nd degree), possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose (gun, two counts, 2nd degree), possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose (knife, 3rd degree), and unlawful possession of a weapon (knife, 4th degree). Ruiz allegedly committed a single armed robbery in Jersey City on May 2, and two armed robberies in Jersey City on May 9.
- **Guillermo F. Garcia-Guzman, 27, of Guttenberg, N.J.**, was charged on May 18 by the Guttenberg Police with possession of a controlled dangerous substance (CDS) (the sedative/painkiller ketamine) (3rd degree) and violating the emergency orders. Police responded to Garcia-Guzman's apartment in the 100 block of 70th Street on a noise complaint. Upon arrival, officers observed 15 to 20 people inside with a DJ, CDS, and alcoholic beverages.

#### **Price Gouging Enforcement**

AG Grewal announced updates on the Division of Consumer Affairs' actions to stop price gouging. As of this week:

- The Division has issued approximately **1,202 cease-and-desist letters** warning retailers about the penalties for violating New Jersey's price-gouging law, and the Consumer Fraud Act's protections from gross and unreasonable inflation of the price of any product during a state of emergency.

- The Division has issued **105 subpoenas** to retailers and online marketplaces reported by consumers for allegedly engaging in unfair price increases and other alleged unscrupulous practices.

The Division has logged a total of **4,912 complaints** related to the COVID-19 emergency against **2,596 locations**. More than 85 percent of the complaints allege unlawful price hikes on essential items like food, bottled water, cleaning products, and personal protective equipment such as masks, disinfectants and sanitizers.

Examples of alleged price hikes that consumers have reported to the Division include:

- a pharmacy allegedly doubling the price of a 50-count package of face masks from \$50 to \$100.
- a pharmacy allegedly charging \$7 for a gallon of water.
- a department store allegedly raising the price of Lysol disinfectant spray from \$5.99 to \$9.99 per can.
- a variety store allegedly selling disinfecting wipes for \$18.
- a wholesaler allegedly selling a 12-pack of paper towels for \$30.99 that before the state of emergency cost \$14.99, and toilet paper for \$39.99 which normally averaged \$24.99 to \$29.99.
- a dollar store allegedly charging \$10 for a gallon of bleach that previously sold for \$3.29.
- a supermarket allegedly selling a 30 oz. bottle of salad dressing that typically cost \$3.49 for \$10.49.

In addition to price gouging, the Division is looking into complaints from consumers alleging unlawful refund practices as a result of closures related to the COVID-19 health emergency. To date, the Division's overall complaints include 322 reports of health clubs, hotels, ticket agents and other businesses allegedly refusing to issue refunds after they closed or suspended services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

New Jersey's price-gouging law, which took effect on March 9 upon Governor Murphy's declaration of a state of emergency, prohibits excessive price increases during a declared state of emergency and for 30 days after its termination. A price increase is considered excessive if the new price is more than 10 percent higher than the price charged during the normal course of business prior to the state of emergency, and the increased price is not attributable to additional costs imposed by the seller's supplier or additional costs of providing the product or service during the state of emergency.

Price-gouging and other consumer fraud violations are punishable by civil penalties of up to \$10,000 for the first violation and \$20,000 for the second and subsequent violations. Violators may also be required to pay consumer restitution, attorney's fees, and investigative fees, and will be subject to injunctive action. Each sale of merchandise is considered a separate violation.

Consumers who suspect consumer fraud, violations, or believe that businesses have unfairly increased their prices in response to COVID-19, are encouraged to file complaints [online](#) to report specific details investigators can follow up on. Photographs of items being sold, receipts and pricing can now be uploaded to our new price gouging complaint form.

On Tuesday, May 19, Attorney General Grewal hosted a Virtual Town Hall Meeting focused on fraud prevention, education and enforcement efforts during COVID-19. It was the fourth in a series of Virtual Town Hall Meetings held during the health emergency as part of the Attorney General's 21 County, 21st Century Community Policing Project, "21/21."

View the Virtual Town Hall Meeting [here](#).

## Other Violations of Executive Orders, Including “Stay at Home” Order, and Ordinance

- **Richard Luecke, 53, of Spotswood, N.J., Bruce Egbert, 59, of Spotswood, N.J., and Barry Korsak, 57, of Monroe, N.J.**, were each charged on May 16 by the Spotswood Police with violating the emergency orders for drinking inside the American Legion in Spotswood. The three men were previously warned by police, and Korsak was previously cited on May 3.
- **Gutemberg De Cavalcante, 31, and Gaffar Poonawalla, 54**, the manager and owner of **Bob Smoke Shop** on Ferry Street in Newark were charged with violating the emergency orders on May 17 when police observed numerous customers in the back of the store.
- **David Fitha, 51, of Brooklyn, N.Y.**, owner of **Payless Clothing Store** on Springfield Avenue in Irvington, was charged twice by the Irvington Police on May 18 and 19 with violating the emergency orders by opening his business to customers.
- **Jonathan Cozzino, 21, of Union City, N.J.**, was charged on May 19 by the Union City Police with violating the emergency orders. Cozzino was the manager on duty at the **Dominos Pizzeria at 524 31st Street**, where officers observed two employees who were not wearing face masks, one who was making pizza and another at the cash register. This location had been warned a number of times in the past month regarding similar conduct.
- **Katherine Hermes, 53, of Peapack, N.J.**, was charged by the Bernardsville Police with violating the emergency orders on May 20 by opening her business, **Country Home Store** at 21 Olcott Square, to customers after previously having been warned by police about opening.
- **Mario N. Alburnia, 63, of Jersey City, N.J.**, was charged on May 21 by the Hoboken Police Department with violating the emergency orders by opening the restaurant he owns, **Mario’s Pizza** on Garden Street, for on-site dining. Police observed several patrons dining at tables both outside and inside of the restaurant. The patrons were seated less than 6 feet from one another and restaurant employees. Alburnia was warned but refused to stop the violations.

Violation of the emergency orders is a disorderly persons offense carrying a sentence of up to six months in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000. Such violations are charged by summons, without arrest.

Since the state of emergency was declared in New Jersey on March 9, at least 36 people have been charged with second-degree terroristic threats during an emergency for spitting, coughing, or otherwise threatening to deliberately expose officers, medical personnel, or others to COVID-19. Second-degree offenses carry a sentence of five to 10 years in state prison and a fine of up to \$150,000.

Third-degree charges carry a sentence of three to five years in 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.

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

If you are seeing a lack of compliance with the Governor’s emergency orders in your town, please contact your local police department or report here [covid19.nj.gov/violation](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/violation)

The Attorney General’s Office and New Jersey State Police will continue to work with law enforcement throughout New Jersey to deter non-compliance behavior.

No one should take advantage of this pandemic to further their own biased agendas. COVID-19 is no excuse to promote anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and or other biased stereotypes. **Please report bias crimes at 1-800-277-BIAS.**

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