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Gurbir S. Grewal
Attorney General



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AG Grewal: Police Are Cracking Down on Violators of COVID-19 Orders - Police Throughout New Jersey Are Filing Criminal Charges Against Violators of Orders to Stay at Home, Close Non-Essential Businesses, and Stop Gatherings

TRENTON – Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal today announced that law enforcement officers across New Jersey have ramped up enforcement efforts over the past week by filing criminal charges against violators of the Governor's Executive Orders (or "emergency orders"), including hundreds of offenders in Newark, where the Newark Police Department deployed a large COVID-19 task force.

"Last week, I said we were done with warnings and would take strong law enforcement action against anyone who failed to heed the Governor's COVID-19 related emergency orders," said Attorney General Grewal. "This crackdown will continue until everyone gets the message that they need to stop these violations, which are putting lives at risk, including the lives of the law enforcement officers who are striving courageously each day to protect us during this emergency. I especially want to commend Newark Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose and Chief Darnell Henry, as well as the men and women of the Newark Police Department, for their extraordinary efforts to protect the residents of Newark and this state. Their work and the work of all our dedicated officers is saving lives."

"Law enforcement and medical professionals are on the frontlines of this battle to protect the citizens of New Jersey from the COVID-19 virus, and we cannot stress enough how important it is that each person follow the guidelines set forth in the Executive Order," said Colonel Patrick Callahan, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police. "Because lives are at stake, enforcement action will be taken without hesitation against those who are blatantly placing the lives of others at risk."

During the past nine days, law enforcement agencies across New Jersey took the following actions to enforce the Governor's COVID-19 related Executive Orders:

Newark Enforcement. The Newark Police Department's COVID-19 task force issued 416 summonses for violation of the emergency orders and ordered 24 non-essential businesses closed in enforcement actions by their between March 30 and April 1.

Joseph Figueroa, 18, Hailey Leavens, 19, Alejandra Aguirre-Lopez, 22, Itayezci Pena-Noyola, 22, and Isais Pena, 20, all residents of Atlantic City, except Leavens, who lives in Mays Landing, were arrested on April 2 on second-degree weapons charges and violations of the executive orders after a loaded .38-caliber revolver was found in their vehicle during an investigation and motor vehicle stop by the Atlantic City Police Department.

Craig O'Neill, 42, of Gloucester City, was charged on March 28 in Gloucester City with violating the emergency orders and trespassing at a business, both disorderly persons offenses.

Edward Montero, 33, of Bridgeton, was charged on March 29 with violating the emergency orders for holding a health supplement sales presentation at a gym with over 10 people.

Rama Igarra, 36, of Clifton, was charged on March 26 with violating the emergency orders for opening the business he manages, Bobby's Discount Home Furnishings store in Orange, N.J., after police warned him that the store had to be closed.

Matthew Shrewsbury, 34, of Milford, was charged on March 31 with violating the emergency orders, terroristic threats, aggravated assault, risking widespread injury, and endangering another person. He allegedly became combative with staff at Hunterdon Medical Center, where he was taken following a motor vehicle accident. Shrewsbury allegedly removed a protective surgical mask from his face, yelled and coughed at nurses and other staff, and threatened to spit on nurses and patients. He allegedly said he had COVID-19 and did not care if he gave it to others.

Wade Jackson, 54, of Ewing, was charged on March 28 with obstruction of administration of law and violation of the emergency orders for holding a party with a DJ and nearly 50 guests inside his one-bedroom apartment in Ewing.

Willi Rojas, 42, of Woodbridge, was charged on March 29 with violating the emergency orders for opening his barbershop in Woodbridge to customers.

Joseph H. Benigno, 56, of Holmdel, was charged on March 31 with violating the emergency orders for holding an auction with 15 to 20 people at a warehouse in Edison.

Steven P. Cato, 20, of Edison, was charged on April 1 with terroristic threats during an emergency, obstruction, resisting arrest, three counts of aggravated assault on an officer, and criminal mischief. When police were called to his house for a domestic incident, he allegedly coughed at officers and claimed to have COVID-19.

Juan Ocampo-Quiceno, 29, of Wharton, was charged on April 1 with violating the executive orders for opening his business, Mine Hill Sports Complex in Wharton, after he was warned to close it. Police found youths playing soccer and men lifting weights at the facility.

Christian Enriquez, 29, of North Plainfield, was charged on April 1 with violating the emergency orders.

Aneka Dawkins, 35, of Morristown, was charged on April 2 with violating the emergency orders.

Anthony J. Lodespoto, 43, of Matawan, allegedly sent messages through social media threatening to attack Jewish residents in Lakewood with a baseball bat. He was charged on March 26 with making terroristic threats during a state of emergency.

William J. Katzenstein, 39, of Lakewood, was charged on March 26 with violating the emergency orders for holding a wedding with 20 to 30 people in his backyard.

Eliezer Silber, 37, and Miriam Silber, 34, of Lakewood, were charged on March 29 with violating the emergency orders and five counts of child neglect for holding a bat mitzvah with 40 to 50 adults and children outside their home.

David Gluck, 48, and Abraham Haberfield, 32, of Lakewood, were charged on March 30 with maintaining a nuisance for holding a gathering of approximately 35 males in a school facility that Gluck owns and Haberfield manages.

Yaakov Kaufman, 47, and Eti Kaufman, 45, of Lakewood, were charged on March 31 with violating the emergency orders and six counts of child neglect for holding an

engagement party at their home with a large number of adults and children. Thirteen adult guests also were charged with violating the emergency orders.

Samuel Manheim, 27, of Brooklyn, N.Y., and 16 other individuals were charged on April 1 with violating the emergency orders for attending an outdoor funeral in Lakewood. Manheim was also charged with hindering apprehension for initially refusing to identify himself to police. Approximately 60 to 70 people were present for the funeral.

Ephraim Adler, 42, and Sarah Adler, 18, of Lakewood, were charged on April 2 with violating the emergency orders for opening the Brooklyn Southwest clothing store in Lakewood to customers. A sign on the door stated "Maximum of 50 People."

Nathan Kline, 66, of Lakewood, was charged on April 2 with violating the emergency orders for illegally selling alcohol out of a rental truck in a residential neighborhood where more than 10 people were present.

Rafael Medina, 21, Robert Feliz, 18, Edwin Valera, 25, Miguel Lopez, 22, and Angel Gonzalez, 18, were charged on March 31 with disorderly conduct for violating the emergency orders after police stopped the vehicle in which they were riding in Passaic.

Joyce Billings, 59, of Columbia, was charged twice by police for opening her business, Post Time Pub in Blairstown, in violation of the emergency orders. She was charged with obstruction on March 27 and violation of a law intended to protect public health on April 2.

Jacqueline Maltese, 48 of Hackettstown, was charged on April 2 with simple assault and filing a false police report. During a domestic violence incident, Maltese repeatedly yelled at officers that she had tested positive for COVID-19. That was not true.

Louis A. Nunez, 52, of Manalapan, was charged on April 2 with making terroristic threats during a state of emergency and throwing bodily fluid at an officer. As he was being booked at the Monmouth County Jail on an unrelated matter he became belligerent and allegedly threatened to spit on a corrections officer, stating he had the coronavirus.

While a number of defendants identified above were also charged with indictable offenses that carry greater penalties, violations of the Governor's emergency orders constitute a disorderly persons offense that carries a potential sentence of up to six months in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000. In addition, earlier this week, Attorney General Grewal announced enhanced charges against six individuals who were charged with assaulting law enforcement officers and violating the emergency orders. Specifically, those enhanced charges included making terroristic threats during a state of emergency, which is a second degree offense and carries a sentence of five to 10 years in state prison and a fine of up to \$150,000. Defendants Cato and Nunez are similarly charged for their conduct against law enforcement officers.

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
<https://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-complaint behavior.

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

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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