

AG James files landmark criminal charges after elderly Queens woman's home stolen in deed theft scheme, [Athena Dawson](#), (August 7th, 2025)

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AG James files landmark criminal charges after elderly Queens woman's home stolen in deed theft scheme



The office of State Attorney General Letitia James on Thursday announced its first indictments under the new criminal deed theft legislation.

James announced that two New York City residents have been charged with multiple felonies in an alleged scheme to defraud an elderly Kew Gardens Hills resident of her home at a press conference on the steps of Queens County Criminal Court on Thursday, Aug. 7. This case is the first of its kind brought under New York's new deed theft law, which went into effect July 19, 2024.

[SO8306](#) was co-authored by AG James and sponsored by state Sen. Zellnor Myrie (D-20) and Bronx Assembly Member Landon C. Dais (D-77). It establishes deed theft as a crime, amends the statute of limitations to give homeowners and prosecutors more time

to seek justice, and allows the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) original criminal jurisdiction to prosecute deed theft. Additionally, the legislation allows the OAG to return the property to the rightful owner.

Deepa Roy of Manhattan and Victor Quimis of Queens are charged with multiple felonies, including four counts of grand larceny, two counts of offering a false instrument for filing, residential mortgage fraud, money laundering, two counts of criminal possession of a forged instrument and scheming to defraud. They are facing a possibility of eight to 25 years in jail, according to James.

Quimis, 39, was arrested and charged on Monday, Aug 4, and Roy, 68, remains at large and faces the same charges, James said.

According to the charges, Roy and Quimis allegedly worked together over the course of two years to steal the home of Renuka Bherwani, an elderly widow and immigrant from India who lived in Kew Gardens Hills, while she received end-of-life hospice care in her home. Bherwani died this June. Prior to the deed theft, she had owned her house with her late husband, Mohan Bherwani, since 1986.

During the press conference, Renuka's son, Kamal Bherwani, revealed that he discovered the deed theft accidentally after receiving a letter in the mail in December 2024.

"My mother, Renuka Bherwani, was 88 years old... was in hospice care and completely bedridden with around-the-clock aids. She could not even turn in bed, or feed herself, or hold a pen, yet while she lay helpless, two individuals, Deepa Roy and Victor Quimis, conspired to steal her home, a home that she rightfully owned and maintained for decades," he said. "We learned of this brazen scheme by sheer accident when a letter from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection came in the mail, arrived, and was addressed to Victor Quimis, welcoming him to his new home. Let these arrests serve as a warning that anyone who targets our seniors will be held accountable."



An OAG investigation found that Roy and Quimis allegedly forged Renuka's signature on documents, transferring ownership of her home to themselves. The pair later forged additional documents to transfer ownership of the home to Hunter Studios & Developer Corp. (Hunter Studios), a corporation owned by Quimis.

Quimis then obtained a \$552,500 mortgage on the property, allowing him to steal over \$300,000 after paying off Renuka's prior mortgage and liens in his name.

Renuka began receiving in-home care from health aides in 2020, and by March 2021, she gave Kamal and her daughter-in-law, Sabita Bherwani, full power of attorney while suffering from dementia.

According to Kamal, Roy began visiting Renuka in 2022 and presented herself as an acquaintance. By the summer of 2024, Roy attempted to live in a spare room in her home, but Kamal and his wife rejected the request.

According to the OAG investigation, in October 2024, Roy and Quimis allegedly forged a deed that included Renuka's signature, transferring ownership of her home to themselves for free. Her signature was notarized with a forged signature and an incorrectly dated stamp from a licensed notary in Nassau County. Additionally, Roy and

Quimis allegedly used Renuka's forged signature on multiple real estate transfer documents, including a registration form for water and sewer billing from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

By December 2024, Quimis and Roy executed a second forged deed to transfer homeownership to Hunter Studios, once again forging the signature of Nassau County's notary, according to the investigation. Quimis allegedly used this second forged deed to secure a mortgage for \$552,500, which allowed him to pay off Renuka's remaining mortgage and liens, now under his name. Quimis then allegedly laundered the proceeds by transferring the remaining balance to Hunter Studios' bank account, which was subsequently used for personal expenses. Roy received at least \$15,000 for her involvement in the scheme, paid via a bank check.

James highlighted that, in addition to the ongoing housing crisis, there is a 'disturbing' increase in housing scams, particularly deed theft. These scams are targeting homeowners who are equity-rich and cash-poor, as well as other vulnerable homeowners in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods.

"Deed theft is heartless, it is a merciless crime, and it steals individuals' homes without their knowledge, and for many Americans, home ownership represents the pinnacle of years of diligence and hard work and service," she said.



Myrie, Dais, and Queens Borough President Donovan Richards were among the elected officials to speak during the press conference announcing the charges against Roy and Quimis.

Myrie, who says he has long been active in combating deed theft in New York City, represents parts of Brooklyn, including East Flatbush, Brownsville, Crown Heights, Prospect Heights, Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Sunset Park, Park Slope, South Slope, and Gowanus, where he says residents have been particularly vulnerable to this crime.



“In 2019, the attorney general and I went door to door in central Brooklyn, warning New Yorkers of these schemes and these frauds to steal their generational wealth, to steal everything they worked for,” he said. “Then, in partnership with the chair of our housing committee, Senator [Brian] Kavanaugh, we held hearings where we heard from victims...and then, in conjunction with Assembly Member Dais and [state Sen. John Liu], we passed legislation to finally make this a crime. We did all of that work for one simple reason: if the law does not work for working people, it does not work at all.”

Myrie gave a stark warning to individuals defrauding homeowners: “You may have been able to get away with it in the past, but your time is up,” he said.

Dais also directed scathing remarks at criminals committing deed theft.

“Do you understand what type of depraved individual you have to be to take advantage of someone in their final days. You have no morals, you have no guide that lets you be a decent person,” he said. “We have to make sure that this doesn’t happen to any more families. Imagine you work all your life to have that nest egg... and someone takes it away from you with a slight of a pen.”



In Queens, residents of the southeast Queens neighborhoods of Cambria Heights, Laurelton, Rosedale, Springfield Gardens, and St. Albans are particularly vulnerable to deed

theft.



Richards, who was born and raised in southeast Queens, said he has seen firsthand how deed theft has impacted his community.

“Make no mistake that this issue disproportionately impacts Black and brown communities,” he said. “It’s no surprise that we’ve seen more than 1000 deed theft complaints in Queens alone over the past decade.”

“This scourge must stop, and because of the leadership of the individuals behind me, we have the legal and prosecutorial tools to crack down,” he added. “Let today be just the first example of justice being served when it comes to deed theft.”

The attorney general’s office encourages anyone who may have fallen victim to deed theft to call 1-800-771-7755 or [fill out a complaint form](#). The office has also established a homeowner protection program [\(HOPP\)](#), a network of free legal organizations that advise homeowners and individuals facing deed theft.