



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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FORMER CITY EMPLOYEE CHARGED WITH RECKLESS ENDANGERMENT IN CONNECTION WITH AN INCIDENT IN WHICH A MAN LOST HIS RIGHT HAND AT A BRONX NYC HOUSING AUTHORITY DEVELOPMENT
--A co-defendant will be apprehended at a later date--

Jocelyn E. Strauber, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), announced the arrest today of a former Caretaker of the New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA") on charges that she paid a man (the "victim") \$20 in May 2024 to complete maintenance duties at the J.P. Mitchell Houses, a NYCHA development in the Bronx. The victim's right hand was severed while performing that work, and the defendant allegedly left him alone on the side of a Bronx road after he was injured, and made false statements about the incident on official NYCHA records. NYCHA notified DOI of this incident, prompting this investigation. The office of Bronx County District Attorney Darcel D. Clark is prosecuting the case.

DOI Commissioner Jocelyn E. Strauber said, "The defendant paid the victim to do dangerous work for which the victim was not trained, abandoned him after that work severed his right hand, and lied about her involvement in the incident on official records, as charged in the complaint. The alleged conduct is appalling and inhumane. I thank NYCHA for immediately reporting this troubling incident to DOI for investigation and the Bronx County District Attorney's Office for its commitment to hold accountable City employees who break the law."

DANIQUE BROOKS, 33, of the Bronx, N.Y., was arrested and charged today with Offering a False Instrument for Filing in the First Degree and Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, both class E felonies; and Reckless Endangerment in the Second Degree and two counts of Official Misconduct, which are class A misdemeanors. Upon conviction, a class E felony is punishable by up to four years in prison and a class A misdemeanor is punishable by up to a year's incarceration. Co-defendant Edward Fernandez, 36, of Bronx, N.Y., will be apprehended separately at a later date.

According to the criminal complaint:

In May and June 2024, BROOKS ("the defendant") and Fernandez worked as NYCHA Caretakers at the J.P. Michell Houses in the Bronx and were assigned to maintenance duties that included operating the buildings' industrial-grade trash compactor, bagging compacted trash, and removing it from the building. NYCHA regulations require Caretakers to undergo two weeks of mandatory training that includes instruction on the safe operation of NYCHA trash compactors. NYCHA regulations also require that the compactor room remain locked to prevent members of the public from entering. DOI's investigation found that the victim was not employed by NYCHA and that NYCHA caretakers would contact him to perform their maintenance duties for them in exchange for cash payments ranging between \$10 and \$20, in violation of NYCHA rules.

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On May 6, 2024, BROOKS contacted the victim and asked if he could perform work for her, specifically operating the trash compactor, bagging the trash, and removing the trash in exchange for \$20. The victim began that work at about 10:45 a.m. and the defendant and Fernandez left the location. As the victim was running the trash compactor, a jam occurred in the disposal chute, and to clear it, he placed his right hand inside the compactor, believing the safety devices would disengage the compactor's motor and stop the machine. However, the compactor continued to move forward, pressing the victim's hand between the compactor and the unit's wall. He screamed for help for several minutes before the defendant and Fernandez returned to the compactor room. The defendant and Fernandez could not find the reverse button for the trash compactor's motor. The victim told DOI investigators that based on his prior experience performing this work, the compactor would reverse only after moving forward and making contact with the opposite wall, creating sufficient pressure to reverse the engine. The man instructed the defendant and Fernandez to start the motor for that purpose. The compactor began to reverse once it hit the unit's wall, revealing that the victim's right hand had been severed from his arm.

The defendant and Fernandez walked the man outside, through a side door of the NYCHA development, and brought him to a curb on 138th Street. The defendant called 911 and then she and Fernandez left the man alone on the sidewalk. The man was transported to Bellevue Medical Center, where the injuries resulted in the loss of his right hand.

When a NYCHA supervisor learned of the incident, she directed the defendant and Fernandez to submit a written report. In her report, the defendant stated that she was outside of the building "killing time" at the time of the incident, observed emergency responders and saw police officers in the basement. Fernandez stated in his report that he was working with BROOKS, operating the trash compactor and removing bagged trash, but that he left for lunch and did not know what happened thereafter.

In June 2024, DOI questioned BROOKS, who initially stated that she and Fernandez bagged and removed the trash in the compactor room and then went to lunch. She denied calling 911, knowing the injured person or seeing anyone in the compactor room. After showing BROOKS phone records and surveillance video stills and photographs, BROOKS acknowledged that she had seen the injured person in the compactor room and had known the man for approximately six years; that they regularly communicated; that FERNANDEZ helped the man out of the building after the incident, and that BROOKS called 911.

BROOKS began working at NYCHA in December 2016 and was a Caretaker at the time of her resignation in August 2024, receiving a base annual salary of approximately \$50,560. FERNANDEZ began working at NYCHA in June 2021 and is a NYCHA Caretaker receiving a base annual salary of approximately \$42,130.

DOI Commissioner Strauber thanked Bronx County District Attorney Darcel D. Clark, Chief of the District Attorney's Public Integrity Bureau Omer Wiczyc, and Bronx District Attorney's Senior Investigative Counsel Jame Goward for their work on this prosecution. DOI Commissioner Strauber also thanked NYCHA Chief Executive Officer Lisa Bova-Hiatt and her staff for promptly reporting the incident to DOI and cooperating with the investigation.

At DOI, the investigation was conducted by Special Investigator Donald Moeller of DOI's Office of the Inspector General for NYCHA and supervised by Assistant Inspector Robert Joyce, Deputy Inspector General Gregory Deboer, Inspector General Ralph Iannuzzi, Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Initiatives Christopher Ryan, and Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Investigations Dominick Zarrella.

A criminal complaint is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country and New York City's corruption watchdog. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City. DOI's strategy attacks corruption comprehensively through systemic investigations that lead to high-impact arrests, preventive internal controls and operational reforms that improve the way the City runs.

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