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Brown, Other DAs, Argue For Funding

BY JOHN TOSCANO

Queens District Attorney Richard Brown was among the city's five district attorneys making a plea for funding to render the best crime-fighting performances possible. Brown asked the City Council last week to restore proposed cuts made by the mayor in their budget requests for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

In testimony before the Finance Committee, headed by Councilmember David Weprin, and the Public Safety Committee, chaired by Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr., Brown reminded the members of the committees that the city's DAs had made some progress in the budget process since appearing before them in March.

"However, we have continuing concerns about our fiscal situation, which impacts greatly on our ability to provide the level of prosecutorial services to which the people of the city are entitled to expect and which will help keep them safe and secure," he continued.

The reasons for the prosecutors' concerns are many, Brown stated candidly, including the continuing impact of past budget reductions that the DAs' offices sustained that have never been restored; reduced funding streams on the federal and state levels; increased caseloads and responsibilities, and the contingent nature of other funding sources.

Brown reminded the council panels that the prosecutors' crisis began with a disastrous series of city, state and federal budget cuts suffered in the aftermath of 9/11, with the most substantial cuts from the city, which provides the DAs with nearly 90 percent of their budgets.

Brown explained, "To date, the monies we lost following 9/11—nearly 20 percent of our budgets—have never been fully restored. Rather, we have received partial funding streams that required substantial redeployment of staff away from day-to-day case handling operations to new assignments. As a result, we continue, even before the proposed additional budget reductions, to be greatly understaffed in areas related to our case functions."

Brown said that the failure of the city to provide the level of restoration that the city council did last year would create a "perfect storm" for the DA's overall budget for Fiscal Year 2009 and beyond and have a profound impact on operations and the level of essential services that the DA would be able to provide to the res-



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idents of Queens county.

"This includes everything from staffing for basic case processing and trial functions, to the level of resources that we can continue to devote to processing cases at the criminal intake stage, to staffing for many of the important new initiatives that we have been working on," he said.

Brown said this takes in specialized anti-gun tracking initiatives; the Queens Child Advocacy Center; felony and misdemeanor drug and mental health courts; the Crimes Against Revenue program; the Family Justice Center for domestic violence matters, and many others.

The veteran DA concluded "While I recognize the serious financial difficulties that face the city in the years ahead and continue to be willing to do our fair share, it makes little sense to attempt to remedy the situation by cutting public safety dollars to the point where our ability to maintain the gains of the last 12 years is in jeopardy."

Brown was accompanied during his appearance before the two committees by Robert Morgenthau, Manhattan District Attorney; Charles J. Hynes, Brooklyn DA; Robert T. Johnson, The Bronx DA; Daniel M. Donovan Jr., Staten Island DA, and Special Narcotics Prosecutor Budget, G. Brennan.

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