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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release on December 7, 2016

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D.A. McMahon: Staten Island man Indicted for Smuggling Cigarettes

***** Wenheng Zhao possessed approximately 480,000 unstamped cigarettes*****

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. – Richmond County District Attorney Michael E. McMahon and New York State Department of Taxation and Finance Acting Commissioner Nonie Manion today announced that WENHENG ZHAO has been indicted on charges including Possession or Sale of Unstamped Cigarettes for possessing approximately 480,000 untaxed cigarettes.

“This defendant smuggled unstamped cigarettes into Staten Island and sold his contraband to clients across the borough,” said District Attorney Michael E. McMahon. “Thanks to months of diligent police work by the Richmond County DA NYPD Detective Squad, his illegal business has been snuffed out and now he will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

“Cigarette smuggling is a serious offense and not something we turn a blind eye to,” said Nonie Manion, Acting Commissioner of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance. “We’ll continue to work with our law enforcement partners to help ensure that those who ignore our laws face justice.”

According to a three-count indictment and documents filed in court, on November 3, 2016 the defendant sold 56 cartons (11,200 cigarettes) of unstamped cigarettes to an Undercover Officer in exchange for a sum of U.S. currency. On November 18, 2016, the defendant sold 52 cartons (10,400 cigarettes) of unstamped cigarettes to an Undercover Officer in exchange for a sum of U.S. currency. On November 21, 2016, the defendant was stopped while driving a black BMW sedan. The defendant was then arrested and a search of the defendant’s car was executed by NYPD pursuant to a valid Search Warrant. Police recovered from the BMW approximately 98 cartons (19,600 cigarettes) of unstamped cigarettes. On November 21, 2016, pursuant to a valid Search Warrant, approximately 2,189 cartons (437,800 cigarettes)

of unstamped cigarettes were recovered from the defendant's house at 87 Forest Green, Staten Island.

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ZHAO was arraigned today in Richmond County Supreme Court, St. George.

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The case is being prosecuted by ADA James Snashall and Andrew Sterrer.

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The charges contained in the attached indictment are merely allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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