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Attorney assists county in sex-offender case

An associate at a Uniondale law firm served as a pro bono assistant district attorney in a case that determined a defendant as a level-two sex offender.

Ralph Branciforte, an associate at Sahn Ward Coschignano in Uniondale, assisted in drafting an appellate brief for the appeal in *People of the State of New York v. Widom* before the Appellate Division's Second Judicial Department.

In this case, the Appellate Division affirmed the New York Supreme Court in Nassau County's order, which had designated the defendant a level-two sex offender. This was an upward departure from the defendant's level-one status, which was determined under the guidelines of the New York State Sex Offender Registration Act, after it was established that there was a higher likelihood of re-offense or danger to the community than previously thought.

Branciforte assisted in successfully arguing that the defendant was correctly designated as a level-two sex offender because of certain factors, including the nature of child pornography that the defendant downloaded from the internet. It was also established that the defendant engaged in sexually explicit communications with a 15-year-old child, set up a time and place to meet, and traveled to the location at a pre-arranged time.

These factors were not adequately taken into account when the defendant was designated previously as a level-one sex offender, according to the Appellate Division.

The Nassau County District Attorney's office offers a program in which private-practice attorneys can serve as pro bono assistant district attorneys. The program focuses on appellate cases where the attorney works with an assistant district attorney in the Appeals Bureau to assist in writing a brief and arguing the case before the Appellate Division.

Branciforte has served as a pro bono attorney at the district attorney's office in two additional matters.