

**CONSUMER AFFAIRS CLOSES THE CURTAIN ON MODELING SCAM;
SUES OPERATORS TO COLLECT RESTITUTION AND OWED FINES**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 23, 2004

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) has shut down a notorious and elusive modeling agency - Faces Models and Actors, located at 248 West 35th Street - for operating without a license. In addition, the DCA has filed a lawsuit against its operators - Judith DeLong and Sharon Backos - seeking restitution for approximately 40 consumers, \$20,000 in unpaid fines to the City, additional penalties, as well as requesting a court order to permanently stop their illegal activities. DeLong and Backos have operated as three other unlicensed modeling agencies over three years including Time Model, NOW! Models, and New York City People.

"The curtain has finally closed for Ms. DeLong and Ms. Backos -- classic scam artists who have repeatedly deceived consumers," said DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra. "Promising modeling and acting jobs with false guarantees and profiting from very expensive photo collections is the oldest trick in the book, and unfortunately easy to fall for. We're pleased to be one step closer in getting money back for consumers and making sure this fly-by-night business stays closed."

Unlicensed agencies operated by DeLong and/or Backos have been issued violations and fined repeatedly for:

Illegally operating an employment agency without a license, in four separate locations under four different names.

Promising jobs if consumers buy a "portfolio" of photographs, only giving negatives once they were purchased, and then requiring additional fees for actual photos in order to get employment.

Deceiving consumers by falsely advertising services in daily newspapers including "MODELS & ACTORS EARN \$900 TO \$1,800 PER JOB," "NO FEES," "MANY JOBS," and "NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY."

By law, New York City modeling and talent agencies that place jobs must be licensed by the DCA, and must be bonded.

To file a complaint, check if a business is licensed, or request a free copy of What You Need to Know About Employment Agencies, call 311 or visit the DCA online at www.nyc.gov/consumers

CONSUMER TIPS WHEN USING A MODELING AGENCY:

- New York City modeling/talent agencies must be licensed by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs and must be bonded, as well. A licensed agency is required to prominently display its license. You should look for the DCA license number on receipts and ask about the license if you do not see it posted.
- Know the difference between modeling/talent agencies and modeling/talent managers. A modeling/talent agency will attempt to secure employment for modeling, theater, film, radio, or television work, but do not manage their client's business affairs. Fees for the agency's services to place jobs are limited to 10% by law, in most instances. On the other hand, managers advise their clients on appearance, style, and overall career direction.
- Legitimate model and/or talent agents do not require or request upfront fees.

- Aspiring models should look for and attend “open calls” at reputable modeling agencies. Well-known agencies usually have open calls on a weekly basis. Also avoid agents who require upfront service fees; require photographs by a specific photographer; and advertise in newspapers, or on buses and subways.
- Upfront fees are illegal. Do not use an agent who requests upfront fees for photo shoots or any other type of service.
- Do not believe promises of work. If a prospective agent tells you he or she can book you for a particular film, video or modeling assignment, beware. The most an agent can do is send you on auditions and put in a good word on your behalf.
- Beware of agents who solicit you over the phone or in person. If someone approaches you on the street, take that person’s business card and check to see if he or she is licensed. If not, forget it.
- Always get references. Before you sign anything, get references from others whom the agent has represented in the past.