

# Top prosecutor joins

## Master will hold three roles within Suffolk DA's office

BY ANDREW SMITH  
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The Suffolk County district attorney's office is the next stop for the man who was involved in both the federal prosecution of former state Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and the ongoing state investigation of President Donald Trump's business dealings.

Howard Master, 44, said coming to work for District Attorney Timothy Sini, his former colleague at the U.S. attorney's office for the Southern District of New York, was like coming home. He grew up in Setauket and his mother and sister still live in Suffolk, although he now lives in Brooklyn.

But more than that, Master said the multifaceted job made the opportunity irresistible. Master will report directly to Sini in three separate roles — special counsel, chief of the Special Investigations Division and chief of the Conviction Integrity Bureau.

Master said the combination of working where he grew up and working with former colleagues such as Sini and the office's chief investigator, John Barry, was impossible to pass up.

"It was like, let's get the team back together. I know about the problems with the prior administration," he said, referring to ethical issues that resulted in murder cases falling apart or being reversed. "It was too good to pass up."

In addition to investigating money laundering and corruption, Master is getting the office's Conviction Integrity Bureau started. It will examine old cases to see if people were convicted wrongly or unjustly.

Master and Sini said it will function similarly to the integrity bureau in the Brooklyn district attorney's office. Just as that office has had to deal with the fallout from false confessions concocted by then Det. Louis Scarcella, Master said Suffolk is still sorting through cases handled by former Assis-

### Howard Master

- Age: 44
- Grew up in Setauket, now of Brooklyn
- Undergraduate degree from Yale University, law degree from New York University
- At the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan, took part in the CityTime, Sheldon Silver and Dean Skelos prosecutions
- At the state attorney general's office, took part in investigations of President Donald Trump's businesses and allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment by Harvey Weinstein
- Teaches about public corruption at University of Pennsylvania's law school

tant District Attorney Glenn Kurtzrock, who hid evidence favorable to the defense in several murder prosecutions.

Sini said the office will issue a report on what it finds when Master's review is finished.

The Brooklyn office has reviewed dozens of Scarcella's cases. So far, 14 men convicted based on his testimony have had their convictions reversed.

#### An independent bureau

Master said the Conviction Integrity Bureau must be kept apart from the district attorney's trial and appellate bureaus because those bureaus are dedicated to winning and preserving convictions. This bureau, however, can't have that goal if it is going to maintain credibility both within the criminal justice system and with the public, Master said. If the bureau is seen as working to minimize the office's mistakes, he said it will fail.

"It's important that it be kept independent from the trial and even appellate bureaus, which defend convictions," he said.

To that end, Master said the bureau's work must be transparent. Although Sini will have the



Howard Master is special counsel to Suffolk DA Timothy Sini, and oversees a new Conviction Integrity Bureau in the DA's office.

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— Howard Master

final say on how certain convictions are handled, Master said it's important for the public to know how decisions are reached to restore confidence in the district attorney's office.

"We will communicate to the public what we find," Master said. "It's a matter of public concern, and it's a matter of con-

cern to our office." and can show the defendant is actually innocent or should not have been convicted, Sini said. That may be because evidence has been found showing the defendant didn't commit the crime, or because it can be shown that the evidence didn't support a conviction.

Cases involving misconduct by prosecutors won't be ignored, Master said.

"It's a real quest for truth," Sini said. "We are adopting a collaborative approach for defense counsel."

The bureau will share its evidence and information with defendants, and will expect defendants to be open with the bureau in the process as well, Sini said.

The office will soon hire two assistant district attorneys to work with Master in the bureau, Sini said. After reviewing cases, those attorneys will write a report and make a recommendation on what to do.

That recommendation will then be reviewed by an independent panel of attorneys, who will be free to differ with the Conviction Integrity Bureau, Sini said. The three members of that panel will be announced shortly, he said.

Sini will then make a final decision on whether to vacate a conviction.

#### Praise for Master

Master's former and current supervisors praise him.

"Howard Master was one of the absolute superstar investigators and casemakers" in the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan, former U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara tweeted last year when Master left that office.

Master had been the deputy chief of that office's criminal division. In addition to the corruption case against Silver — who was sentenced to 7 years in prison — Master was involved in the investigation of former State Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos of Rockville Centre, who also was convicted. Master also worked on the CityTime case, which Bharara described at the time as the largest municipal fraud and kickback scheme in history.

In that case, the prosecution showed that New York City's payroll modernization project

Sini

## LONG BEACH STRUGGLES TO FILL TOP ROLES

BY JOHN ASBURY  
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ballooned to more than 100 times its original cost estimate because of kickbacks and money laundering.

Three men were sentenced to 20 years each in the case for conspiracy to commit bribery, money laundering and other charges, and the federal government won \$550 million in forfeitures.

In addition to investigating Trump at the state attorney general's office, Master began a civil rights lawsuit against movie mogul Harvey Weinstein for sexual misconduct and harassment.

Master said he hopes to use his experience to target corruption in Suffolk County.

"There are so many ways public officials can commit fraud," Master said.

It took a while before Master realized he wanted to be a lawyer, and even longer until he figured out he wanted to be a prosecutor, he said.

At Ward Melville High School in Setauket, Master was a self-described drama nerd, acting in the musicals "Carousel" and "Pippin" while taking part in the math club.

"There is a performative element to working on trial," he said.

He went to Yale University and emerged as a governmental management consultant, traveling around the country trying to help municipalities operate more efficiently.

He soon enrolled at New York University's law school, but didn't become enamored with being a prosecutor until he worked as a clerk for two federal judges near the end of his time there.

"It spoke to me," he said, adding that seeing lawyers work to hold others accountable for their actions was inspiring to him.

Barry Scheck, co-founder and director of the Innocence Project, said he met with Sini, Master and others from the district attorney's office recently about the Conviction Integrity Bureau and came away impressed.

"He's a smart, thoughtful guy," Scheck said. "So far, he seems inclined to pursue the best practices of conviction integrity. . . . We're extremely encouraged."

Long Beach is struggling to find permanent leadership to run the city while at the center of a fiscal crisis and a state audit of millions in payouts to current and former employees.

City Council members say they have received about 40 resumes and interviewed at least seven finalists for city manager, but cannot agree on any one candidate. An interim city manager has been at the helm for the past 10 months, and a former city comptroller is paid hourly to consult on budgets.

Council members argue that they shouldn't rush the process until they can find the right person. They also said a recruiting firm may be hired if a new city manager cannot be found. "This is difficult decision and Long Beach is a unique community and it requires as much time as it takes," City Council Vice President Chumi Diamond said.

The city manager is appointed by the five-member council to act as the top administrator for the city of 35,000 permanent residents and 363 full-time employees. The duties include budget drafting and presenting policy initiatives for the council.

In the interim, Long Beach

Police Commissioner Michael Tangney has served a dual role without taking additional salary to serve as acting city manager, including drafting a \$95 million budget, which was approved in May.

The city pays former Comptroller Kristie Hansen-Hightower a \$100-per-hour retainer as a consultant. She left in August 2017 to serve as comptroller to the Town of Southold.

At least two City Council members said they hope to have a candidate within the next few weeks. Officials say there are no local or internal candidates. City Council President Anthony Eramo said the city has narrowed its finalists to two to three out-of-state candidates.

"We all recognize this is the number one thing facing the city right now," Eramo said.

Tangney got the city through the budget and its peak summer season, but he said the city needs a permanent leader. "Stability is always better. Where we might be lacking is planning. I'm not making big plans, because I may not know how long I'm going to be here," he said.

He had initially planned to leave in July, but agreed to stay through the year until a replacement is found. He said he wants to return to the police

department by next year.

Municipal credit agencies have taken notice of the city's lack of permanent leadership.

Moody's Investors Service, which bases 20 percent of its bond score on a city's management team, gave Long Beach a negative outlook on its finances in May, potentially affecting the city's interest rate when it borrows.

Moody's noted in an August report that the city was using debt and bonds to cover operating expenses, including separation payments.

"Compounding the fiscal problems, the city has been without a full-time comptroller for a year and a city manager for the past eight months," the August report states. "An unstable management team has added financial pressure related to Long Beach's credit profile as a management team that does not stay in place long enough to understand the relevant issues and implement reforms poses a hurdle."

The City Council has come close to hiring a city manager after first posting the position in December to replace Jack Schnirman, who was elected Nassau County comptroller.

Last month, two different factions of the all-Democrat council met with former city man-

ager Ed Eaton, who served for 24 years. He agreed to serve as city manager through the end of next year while a permanent replacement could be found.

Eaton said the council moved on without holding a vote after they could not get three of the five council members necessary to appoint him.

"They're rudderless. The city is drifting. Nothing is happening and things are out of control," Eaton said. "The city needs someone to get this council in line and working together and right now they can't sit in the same room. They're fiddling while Long Beach burns and it doesn't need to be this way."

Residents have protested and clamored for an independent city manager to stabilize the city's finances and investigate payouts of accrued time to current and former employees. The state comptroller's office is conducting an audit of the city's finances and payouts.

The search was put on hold last spring as the council focused on passing the budget that carried an 8.3 percent property tax hike to close a \$4.5 million deficit. The city was also facing a shortfall after council members defeated a \$2.1 million bond measure to fund separation pay and employee payouts.

## Starting over with Torah

Mali Cooper, 11, carries a Torah inside Temple Beth-El of Great Neck to celebrate Simhat Torah, a joyous holiday that marks the end of the Torah-reading cycle and the start of a new one. The Torah scrolls are carried around the synagogue in seven circuits.



DEBBIE EGAN-CHIN