

Charges against Occupy Philly protester dropped

by Joseph A. Slobodzian, INQUIRER STAFF WRITER, Posted: December 15, 2011



A Philadelphia judge dismissed the most serious charges Thursday against an Occupy Philadelphia protester arrested Nov. 30 for assaulting a police officer after protesters were evicted from Dilworth Plaza.

Municipal Judge Karen Y. Simmons dismissed the charges of aggravated assault, riot, recklessly endangering another person, and resisting arrest that had been lodged against Gregory Harris, 29, a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania.

Harris was arrested shortly after 4 a.m. Nov. 30 in the 100 block of North Broad Street. He was among 52 Occupy demonstrators arrested around Dilworth Plaza and north toward Spring Garden Street after police cleared the Occupy encampment to prepare the plaza for a \$50 million reconstruction project.

Most were charged with misdemeanor counts of obstruction and failing to disperse. But according to defense attorney Paul J. Hetznecker, only Harris was charged with the felony count of aggravated assault.

Hetznecker, who with lawyer Lawrence S. Krasner has been representing Occupy protesters without charge, said Harris was accused of using his forearm to strike Officer Joseph Sisca, a bicycle officer, knocking his helmet onto the bridge of his nose and cutting it.

Simmons, however, ruled that there was a lack of evidence supporting the charges that Harris, boxed in by the crowd, intentionally assaulted the officer.

The judge ordered Harris to be tried Jan. 27 in Municipal Court on a misdemeanor count of simple assault.

Since Nov. 30, the Occupy Philadelphia cases have been wending their way through the city's justice system.

All those charged were given the choice of going to trial on charges of conspiracy, failure to disperse, and obstruction, or entering the Accelerated Misdemeanor Program.

AMP is an alternative that lets nonviolent offenders pay a fine and costs totaling \$199.50 and perform community service to avoid trial and possibly get their arrest records expunged.

The largest group is the 52 arrested Nov. 30. Police also arrested 15 protesters Oct. 24 after a sit-in outside Police Headquarters; nine people Nov. 2 inside the Comcast Center; and 14 on Nov. 18 at a Wells Fargo Bank at 17th and Market Streets.

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Thus far, a total of 53 from all four groups has elected trial and 29 to enter AMP.

Hetznecker said two court dates have been set aside for the remaining defendants to announce their decisions: Tuesday and Dec. 30. The trials will be scheduled in groups early next year.

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