



BCPO News

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Mount Laurel Man Faces Additional Bias Intimidation Count, Four Charged with Criminal Acts During Summer Protest at His Home

*BCPO Completes Review of Mount Laurel Police Department's
Response to Complaints Concerning Edward C. Mathews*

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced today that the Mount Laurel man arrested in July for bias intimidation of his neighbors and other crimes has been charged with leaving a threatening note on one of his victim's cars earlier this year, and also vandalizing the victim's vehicle.

Edward Mathews, 45, of Gramercy Way, was charged today with Bias Intimidation (4th Degree) and Harassment (Petty Disorderly Persons Offense). He was served with the charges in the Burlington County Jail in Mount Holly, where he has been held since his July 5 arrest.

The investigation of Mathews, conducted by the Prosecutor's Office and the Mount Laurel Police Department, has now resulted in 22 separate charges against him since July 2, including Bias Intimidation, Harassment, Criminal Mischief, Possession of a Weapon (Slingshot) For an Unlawful Purpose, Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance, Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance with Intent to Distribute, Stalking, Certain Persons Not to Have Weapons, and Possession of Drug Paraphernalia. The charges are pending presentation to a grand jury for possible indictment.

The racially-charged words and actions of Mathews against his neighbors on July 2 went viral on social media and resulted in a large protest outside of his residence three days later, the same day he was arrested.

Mount Laurel Police Department officers who took him into custody had to work their way through the crowd to place him into a patrol vehicle. Four people who were in the crowd were charged today with crimes that included discharging pepper spray at the police and Mathews, damaging property, and spitting at the police.

Tawanda M. Jones, 48, of Park Boulevard in Camden, is accused of discharging pepper spray onto the officers who were apprehending Mathews. She was charged with Possession of a Weapon for an Unlawful Purpose (Third Degree), Unlawful Possession of a Weapon (Fourth Degree), Aggravated Assault on a Police Officer (Fourth Degree), Simple Assault (Disorderly Persons Offense), and Disorderly Conduct (Petty Disorderly Persons Offense).

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Daniel A. Harris, 25, of Cooper Street in Beverly, is accused of throwing a brick-like object through a window at Mathews' residence just after he was taken into custody. He was charged with Criminal Mischief (Fourth Degree) and Disorderly Conduct (Petty Disorderly Persons Offense).

Christopher D. Staples, 21, of Colgate Avenue in Pemberton, is accused of throwing rocks toward officers as they were walking the defendant to the Mount Laurel police vehicle. The rocks struck the vehicle, causing nearly \$600 in damage. He was charged with Criminal Mischief (Fourth Degree) and Disorderly Conduct (Petty Disorderly Persons Offense).

Khalil Wilson, 18, of Coventry Way in Mount Laurel, is accused of spitting toward police officers while standing on top of a vehicle as they escorted Mathews from his home. He was charged with Throwing Bodily Fluids at Law Enforcement Officers (Fourth Degree) and Disorderly Conduct (Petty Disorderly Persons Offense).

The charges were filed on a summons for each defendant. They were not taken into custody. First appearances in Superior Court will be scheduled in the near future.

"The outrage sparked by Mathews' conduct on the viral video does not give permission to anyone to commit unprovoked assaults upon police officers or acts of vandalism," Prosecutor Coffina said. "These were blatant crimes, caught on video, and the individuals responsible must be held accountable, regardless of whether they were committed in the midst of a protest or at any other time."

The most recent charge against Mathews was filed after a handwriting analysis performed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation revealed that a threatening note left on a neighbor's vehicle in January had been written by Mathews. Feces also had been smeared on the vehicle.

Prior to July, multiple complaints had been lodged with Mount Laurel police concerning Mathews' behavior, dating to 2016, but no charges had been filed. This led to allegations by some that the department was showing favoritism toward Mathews and failed to investigate the accusations made against him.

As a result, the Prosecutor's Office announced on July 6 that it would undertake an independent review of all previous incidents reported to Mount Laurel police involving Mathews, and also MLPD's response to them.

Today, the Prosecutor's Office is releasing the results of its review. Among other findings, the review found no indication of favoritism shown toward Mathews, and that neither individual MLPD officers, nor the department as a whole, failed to investigate or were dismissive of the complaints raised by his neighbors. However, the report notes that MLPD generally viewed the complaints raised by Essex Place residents on a case-by-case basis, rather than taking a problem-oriented approach. With a broader perspective on the situation in the community, MLPD might have been able to devise an effective solution and brought relief to the residents Mathews had victimized sooner than his July 2 arrest.

"We empathize with the residents of Essex Place who were on the receiving end of Mathews' conduct," Prosecutor Coffina commented about the report released today. "No one should have to endure racial harassment anywhere, but especially not in their own neighborhood and even in their own home."

All persons are considered innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.