

## **S.J. drug raid leaves bystander with broken leg, facing charges**

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A bystander at a drug raid that brought a swarm of police to her apartment complex, nurse's assistant Nekiesha Williams had one thought as she hurried into the parking lot.

"My daughter's out there and I'm going to go get her before something bad happens,' the 24-year-old mother of two said.

In the parking lot, where her 5-year-old daughter had been riding her bike, she saw more than two dozen officers with guns in their hands, she said. Before the incident was over, Williams lay handcuffed on the ground with a broken leg, facing charges including aggravated assault on a police officer.

A West Deptford officer claims Williams struck him in the face. "It didn't happen,' she said.

Williams said three police officers "slammed me on the ground,' breaking her right femur, or thigh bone, as she looked for her daughter at the door of a unit at Red Bank Run Apartments. It was the same unit West Deptford officers were raiding, resulting in two narcotics arrests.

Williams said she didn't argue with police. But she insisted on retrieving her daughter from the apartment, where the child had a playmate.

A police report on the Aug. 8 incident says Williams was asked to wait outside while officers looked for her daughter.

Instead, she "stated f--- you, I ain't sitting down, I'm getting my baby,' wrote West Deptford Officer Pat Goggin.

Williams lunged from a lawn chair, "pushed me in the face with both hands and began to swing her arms at me,' the officer reported. As he tried to control her arms, Goggin wrote, "she struck me on the left side of the jaw with her arms.'

With assistance from another officer, Williams "was then taken to the ground,' continuing to fight until handcuffed, Goggin said.

The charges against Williams, which include resisting arrest and obstructing justice, are pending in the Gloucester County Prosecutor's Office. The assault and resisting arrest charges could result in county grand jury indictments.

The Camden County nursing home employee had also faced eviction proceedings, but no action was taken by the Gloucester County Housing Authority, said her attorney, Stanley King. Under federal regulations for subsidized housing, known as the "one strike" rule, one arrest can get a tenant evicted. She was notified of possible removal from her apartment the day after police formally charged her. Williams has no prior criminal record, King said.

Two weeks ago, King filed a tort claims notice with West Deptford Township. That is a required preliminary step before filing a lawsuit against a municipality. The notice alleges civil rights violations, unlawful arrest and unnecessary use of force against Williams.

"Her injury was consistent with that of a car accident," King said. "It's almost unheard of to have a femur broken in this manner." The bone is the largest and densest in the body, he noted.

"It takes a tremendous amount of force to break someone's femur," King said.

West Deptford Police Chief James Mehaffey said he could not comment in detail because of the pending litigation.

"We have conducted our investigation and that will come out in court," he said.

But Mehaffey said other tenants had been questioned, and "we have not corroborated her (Williams') story at all."

Williams had a metal rod surgically placed in her right leg at Underwood-Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, King said. It's expected to remain in place for about two years. She remains out of work on disability.

King said photographs also show bruises on Williams "where they grabbed her arms with such force it left indentations that didn't go away for over a week."

No civilian witnesses "saw Ms. Williams strike or attempt to strike anyone that day," King said. "This was just a hysterical mother trying to save her daughter."

King questioned police priorities at the raid.

"If in fact they're on notice there's a child in harm's way, that should take precedence over arresting another drug dealer," he said.

Williams said she's talked with her daughter about the incident, part of which the child witnessed.

"I just told her it was an accident. She said, 'I know why your leg got broken. The cops did that.'"

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