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Grand jury returns indictment in bias crime involving SE Portland food cart operator

Today, Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill announced that a grand jury indicted 30-year-old Sierra Lavonne McDonald for allegedly committing a bias crime after she told the operator of a Mexican food cart to “go back to Mexico” and then poured soda on, and spit on, chicken that was being prepared.

According to court documents, on September 21, 2019, McDonald went to the victim’s food cart in Southeast Portland on two separate dates. In the first instance, McDonald became verbally aggressive toward the food cart operator and told her to “Go back to Mexico.” Without any explication, McDonald allegedly took a can of soda and poured it over the chicken, which was being cooked. McDonald then allegedly poured soda over the victim’s head while using racial hate speech. The victim called police who attempted to contact McDonald but she hung up on officers.

Later that day, McDonald returned to the food cart upset that the victim had called police.

The next day, on September 22, according to court documents, another employee was at the food cart working with the victim. When McDonald returned, she once again used racial hate speech toward both food cart employees, grabbed a wooden stake and made a stabbing motion toward the other employee.

The wooden stake had a sharp pointed tip and was about one inch in width and four feet in length, according to court documents.

The second victim told police that she was afraid McDonald was going to hurt her with the wooden stake, according to court documents.

McDonald then went over to the grill where she attempted to fling off some of the chicken that was being prepared, according to court documents. McDonald is accused of spitting in the direction of the grill, which required the food cart operators to throw away 12 whole chickens due to health concerns, according to court documents.

After attempting to spit on the grill, McDonald used the wooden stake and started aggressively waiving it toward the same victim from the first encounter on September 21, 2019, according to court documents.

The chicken the food cart lost that day was valued at approximately \$300, according to court documents.

On December 17, 2019, a Multnomah County grand jury indicted McDonald with four counts of bias crime in the second degree, two counts of criminal mischief in the second degree, one count of harassment, two counts of menacing, one count of bias crime in the first degree, and one count of unlawful use of weapon.

On December 22, 2019, members of the Portland Police Bureau’s Eat Precinct Neighborhood Response Team arrested McDonald in the 15700 block of Southeast Division Street. McDonald appeared in Multnomah County Circuit Court earlier this morning for her arraignment.

The Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office was an active participant of the Oregon Attorney General’s Hate Crimes Task Force and helped draft the language that was in Senate Bill 577. The law, which went into effect on July 15, 2019, renamed the crime of

“intimidation” to “bias crime,” added gender identity to the list of protected categories and removed the requirement that two or more people commit the crime in order to make it a felony in certain circumstances.

All potential bias crime cases, whether they are a felony or misdemeanor, are reviewed by the Violent Crimes Unit within the Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office. If a misdemeanor crime is issued, the felony-level attorney will retain the case.

If you are the victim of a bias crime assault or you are witnessing one, immediately call 9-1-1. If you are the victim of a bias crime and the suspect is no longer present or if you have information about a bias crime committed in the past, call the non-emergency line at 503-823-3333.

Like in all criminal and civil matters, electronic copies of court documents, which are not subject to a protective order, are available to the public through the Oregon eCourt Information (OEI) system.

No additional information can be released by the Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office at this time pursuant to the Oregon Rules of Professional Conduct.

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