

logo not found or type unknown

Watch: Court Drops Case After Video Contradicts Peace Officer's Claims of Assault and Racial Slurs During Covid Check

Community Center / **Published On October 26, 2023 06:15 AM /**

Janeke Simon **October 26, 2023**

Image not found or type unknown



DOH Officer, Wanson Harris, attempts arrest of Nathalie Hollins, who then assaults him, according to videos reviewed by the Consortium. Nowhere in the video is James Bildahl seen assaulting or hurling racial slurs. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The matter in which a peace officer [claimed to have been physically and racially abused](#) while he tried to enforce Covid regulations at a local bar in Cane Bay has now been resolved in favor of the defendants.

Nathalie Hollins and James Bildahl were arrested in June 2020 following a routine inspection at the Spratnet Beach Bar and Restaurant. The V.I. Department of Health enforcement officer,

Wanson Harris, said that while conducting his duties at the establishment that evening, the pair hurled racial epithets towards him, hit him in the face, threw beer on him, bit and spat on him. Harris said he was called a "black monkey" and was told to get his "black ass from here," according to the probable cause fact sheet.

However, as the case wended its way through the court, attorneys for the defendants began asking questions about the nature of the evidence against the pair. In December 2020, counsel for Bildahl filed a motion asking the court to compel prosecutors to turn over evidence they say contradicted the narrative told by the peace officer.

Defense lawyers argued that there were two Department of Health employees at the bar that evening, and that one was recording on her mobile phone. Those recordings, which were not turned over to the defense during the discovery process, Bildahl's attorneys said, proved that their client was not the one who assaulted the peace officer. "The People are violating the civil rights of the Defendant in this matter if Discovery is not provided immediately," the attorneys warned. They attached two photos to the motion, seemingly showing that a different patron, not their client, had made physical contact with the officer that evening.

After an initial attempt to deny responsibility for turning over the video in question, prosecutors ultimately admitted that they did have an obligation to produce and supply the video to the defense team as part of the discovery process. The state also admitted that the video was "exculpatory", meaning that it seemed to clear Bildahl of the allegations against him.

The videos depict Hollins attacking Harris during the arrest attempt. Yet, they do not show Bildahl either physically assaulting the officer or using racial slurs against him.

Even after that admission in 2021, the matter continued until October 25, 2023, when prosecutors asked the court to dismiss the case with prejudice, meaning that the charges will never be refiled. "Given the totality of the circumstances and evidence in this matter, it is in the interest of justice that this matter be dismissed," attorneys for the state declared. The case against Hollins had been dismissed – also with prejudice – in early October, after she completed 40 hours of community service.

Kye Walker, attorney for Bildahl, says the videos which helped exonerate her client are evidence of the false statements of the Department of Health officials. While they do not show any racial abuse as claimed by the inspecting officer, they do depict what the attorney called the "mishandling" of Ms. Collins, who was handcuffed and left to lie on the ground in a state of apparent intoxication.

Ms. Walker says her client now hopes that the conduct of the Department of Health officers on that night is "appropriately investigated and that appropriate training be provided regarding encounters with members of the public who may be under the influence or other impairment, use of force, false statements, and the withholding of evidence."