

## Convicted Officer Back On The Beat

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HARRISONBURG - A city police officer convicted of animal cruelty for beating an injured cat to death during a public service call in November has returned to duty as a patrol officer.

Officer Jonathan Snoddy, 25, who has been on paid administrative leave since he was charged in January, has appealed his conviction and will be retried in Rockingham County Circuit Court on April 9. Unlike his first trial, a special prosecutor will handle the case.

"Officer Snoddy has returned to his normal patrol assignment with the Harrisonburg Police Department," said Mary-Hope Vass, the department's public information officer.

She refused to answer additional questions about Snoddy's employment status or why he was returned to active duty.

"No further information will be released from HPD due to the confidentiality of the internal affairs investigation," Vass said.

On March 8, retired Judge Steven Helvin of Charlottesville found Snoddy guilty of one count of misdemeanor animal cruelty during a bench trial in Rockingham County General District Court. Helvin fined Snoddy \$50, but the officer avoided a jail sentence.

Snoddy's defense attorneys, John Holloran and Bill Eldridge, appealed the verdict to Rockingham County Circuit Court, requesting a trial by jury.

### Prosecutor Change

When Snoddy heads to trial next month, his case will have a new prosecutor.

Previously, Cristabel Opp, an assistant in the Rockingham County Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, prosecuted the case.

But the office requested that Circuit Court Judge James Lane assign a special prosecutor to handle the appeal.

Lane appointed Page County Commonwealth's Attorney Ken Alger to prosecute Snoddy.

Rockingham County Commonwealth's Attorney Marsha Garst said the request was made after a second ruling by the Virginia State Bar.

The initial ruling, made before Snoddy's first trial, cleared the local commonwealth's attorney's office to prosecute the case. The bar stated that the office did not have an in-depth relationship with Snoddy.

After the conviction and request for a new trial, Garst consulted the bar again and it ruled a special prosecutor would be needed because of the relationships prosecutors have with several officers who testified in the case.

### The Case

The Virginia State Police charged Snoddy on Jan. 12 after Garst's office asked for an outside investigation into his actions.

On Nov. 11, Wayne Meadows, a Harrisonburg resident who lives on Settlers Lane, called police for help dealing with a cat that he said had been hit by a car and severely injured.

Snoddy arrived at the home and decided it was best to put the cat down because of its injuries.

The police department's policies call for an officer to shoot an animal after receiving permission from a supervisor. But Meadows claims Snoddy beat the cat with his nightstick "15 to 20 times" before the animal eventually died.

Snoddy disputed Meadows' claim during his trial in general district court, testifying that he hit the cat three or four times. His defense attorneys further argued that it seemed unlikely their client could have struck the cat as many times as Meadows claimed because the animal suffered just one head wound.

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