

Dear Justice Minister Mark Furey,

I am writing today to demand that you drop the charges against Santina Rao. Santina Rao is a Black Nova Scotian who, while shopping with her two young children at the Halifax Shopping Centre Walmart, was charged with causing a disturbance, assaulting a peace officer, and resisting arrest after three floor walkers and two police officers approached her and accused her of stealing and concealing a head of lettuce, two lemons, and a grapefruit in her stroller. Santina had already paid for \$90 worth of electronics at the electronics department and was on her way to the check out with her produce in her stroller when she stopped in the toy aisle to pick out a doll for her daughter. While looking at toys with her daughter, she was approached by two police officers and three floor walkers and accused of stealing and concealing items. When Santina told the police officers to check her receipt for the electronics, her bag, and her stroller, she was disregarded by the police and was instead accused again of being a thief. When Santina became stressed and agitated by the questions being asked of her, the police attempted to arrest her for causing a disturbance and called in three more police officers. Santina rightly protested her arrest and a police officer grabbed at and tried to pull her child away from her. In an effort to protect her child, Santina scratched the face of the police officer and the police then escalated physical violence against her. While having handcuffs put tightly on her wrists causing bruising, Santina has described the officer as saying "She's a feisty fucking bitch, this one."

In light of the 2019 Halifax Nova Scotia Street Checks Report which clearly demonstrates that racial discrimination and violence in policing is an ongoing issue in Halifax, it is reasonable that Santina would be wary of police officers and would be scared of and angered by police officers accusing her of committing a crime she had not committed. Further, even though chief Dan Kinsella has stated that "De-escalation is first and foremost in all police officers," it is clear that police did not practice de-escalation when Santina became agitated, but instead escalated the situation by trying to arrest her for causing a disturbance, calling in more police officers, and grabbing at her child. They also clearly used excessive force in Santina's arrest as she suffered a concussion, broken wrist, and injuries to her neck and arms as a result of the altercation.

I am writing you today because it is clear that there would not have been a disturbance, assault, or arrest to resist if the police officers had not been called on a Black woman doing absolutely nothing wrong, if they had believed her when she told them she was on her way to the check out, and at the very least, if they had practiced de-escalation as they are meant to do. I am writing to you today because this is very clearly a case of racial profiling and police violence against an unarmed Black woman out doing her shopping with her children. The police should have never been called on Santina and she should have never been in the frightened and stressed position she was put in in the first place. Placing items in your stroller as you shop is a common, everyday practice. Santina had not left the store. She had not committed a crime; yet, because the police officers assumed her guilt despite all the evidence to the contrary (who steals a few dollars worth of produce after purchasing \$90 worth of electronics?), she is now facing charges. The charges laid against Santina would have all been prevented if the police had checked her receipt and apologized, rather than escalating the situation and causing her severe bodily harm. All charges against her very clearly must be dropped and she should be issued a formal apology.

Sincerely,

"She is a feisty fucking bitch, this one"??? In front of her baby?? In front of other shoppers and staff?? Grabbing at her child?? Grabbing at her child???By waving handcuffs at her, she was powerless and vulnerable. This kind of maltreatment of a human being is unfathomable. What is happening with today's police forces and why is it escalating?? Policing black lives in Canada is parallel to that which occurs in the US. Shame. There is no question a full apology should be given to Santina Rao, and all charges dropped. Justice Minister Furey, what is taking so long?

Gail Clark, RN (retired), BA Anth/Hist.

