



## OFFICE OF THE MERCER COUNTY PROSECUTOR

**ANGELO J. ONOFRI**

*Prosecutor*

**JESSICA PLUMERI**

*Chief of County Detectives*

209 S. Broad Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
P.O. Box 8068  
Trenton, New Jersey 08650-0068  
Phone: (609) 989-6350  
mercercountyprosecutor.com

**STEPHANIE A. KATZ**

*First Assistant Prosecutor*

**TAREK A. ELKACHOUTY**

*Deputy Chief of County Detectives*

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### **East Windsor Man Admitted into Pretrial Intervention Program**

A 36-year-old East Windsor man charged in February 2020 with animal cruelty was admitted into the pretrial intervention program (PTI) this week, Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri reported.

On Thursday afternoon, May 13, 2021, Matthew Wydrinski entered a plea of not guilty to an accusation charging him with third-degree animal cruelty before Mercer County Superior Court Judge J. Adam Hughes. Wydrinski's participation in the PTI program requires him to complete 40 hours of community service, pay fines and costs associated with the case, obtain/maintain employment, and report to a supervising probation officer as directed for a three-year period. He is also forbidden from owning or possessing any animals during the term of PTI.

This case relates to an incident that occurred in East Windsor Township in November 2019. At that time, an internet post was created for the purpose of obtaining assistance for a sick dog. Authorities learned that the dog referenced in the post – a seven-year-old pit bull – later died as the result of being severely undernourished. On February 13, 2020, Wydrinski was charged with third-degree animal cruelty for failing to provide the animal with necessary care.

According to the New Jersey Courts website, PTI provides defendants, generally first-time non-violent offenders, with opportunities for alternatives to the traditional criminal justice process of ordinary prosecution. PTI seeks to render early rehabilitative services when such services can reasonably be expected to deter future criminal behavior.

Pursuant to 2C:44-1(e), unless certain factors are present, there is a presumption of non-incarceration for convictions of third-degree crimes. None of those factors were present in this case. Additionally, Wydrinski is 36 years old with no criminal history of any kind. PTI is specifically designed to allow defendants with no criminal record to avail themselves of supervisory treatment rather than incarceration in certain situations. Lastly, none of the presumptive factors against admission into PTI set forth in 2C:43-12(b)(2) apply.

“Currently, the New Jersey Legislature does not classify animal cruelty crimes as crimes of violence. I am aware that steps are being taken in the Legislature to change this classification and remove animal cruelty crimes from the purview of PTI,” Prosecutor Onofri said. “Regardless of my personal views on animal cruelty laws, I am bound to enforce the law as it is written. Until such time as animal cruelty laws are changed, PTI will remain an appropriate and common resolution to these types of crimes.”