

# Animal cruelty charge dropped in Merrimack Outlets case

By Kimberly Houghton Union Leader Correspondent  
Dec 18, 2019

MERRIMACK — Charges have been dismissed against a Hampton Falls man who left his girlfriend's dog in a car while he shopped.

Leiland Stanford Stevens, who is partially deaf, said he was getting earphones adjusted at a store, which usually takes about 15 to 20 minutes, but took closer to an hour on Monday.

Judge Michael Ryan of the 9th Circuit Court, Merrimack District Division, recently dropped a charge of animal cruelty against Leiland Stanford Stevens in connection with a June 3 incident at the Merrimack Premium Outlets, according to court documents.

Stevens has said that he left his girlfriend Deborah Croswell's Peekapoo in his vehicle with both of the front two windows open a few inches and one of the back windows cracked slightly.

Stevens, 66, is partially deaf in both ears. He was shopping at the outlets to get three sets of earphones adjusted at the Bose store. While this usually takes about 15 to 20 minutes, it took closer to an hour on that day, he has said.

Police were called to investigate, and Stevens was arrested and charged with one count of animal cruelty.

Stevens' attorney, Andrew Cotrupi, had filed a request for judicial notice that included weather data and wind recordings from June 3.

According to court records, temperatures were around 67 degrees, with passing clouds and wind gusts, at the time of the alleged offense. An infrared temperature reading revealed an interior temperature of 103 degrees inside the vehicle at the time, police said.

“It will be undisputed that two windows were left open approximately three inches at the time, and no allegation exists of any injury to the dog,” Cotrupi wrote in court documents. “It is anticipated the issue of the weather conditions existing at the time will be relevant to the court's determination.”

A trial date had been scheduled four times in the case, which was eventually dropped last month.

Stevens said this week the law states that it shall be cruel to confine an animal in a motor vehicle in which the temperature is either so high or so low “as to cause serious harm to the animal.” While he supports police taking action if this occurs, the law must be followed; Croswell's dog was not harmed, he said.

Although he said he was vindicated, his case was annulled and his arrest was invalid, Stevens stressed that pet owners should never leave their pet in a hot car.

“One lesson I did learn, that I think all dog owners should do, is keep a regular air temp gauge in your vehicle at all times, and to keep water for your dog in the vehicle,” he said.