

Woman sues US federal agent over fake Facebook page

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A woman is suing the United States and a federal agent who set up a fake Facebook page in her name with racy pictures from her cell phone in a bid to ensnare drug traffickers.

The little known civil action, filed at a US district court in the northeastern university city of Syracuse last year, was first reported by BuzzFeed this week and dates back to 2010.

The incident happened after Sondra Arquiett, now 28, was arrested in July 2010 on suspicion of taking part in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine. While under arrest, agents seized her phone.

A month later a Facebook account in her married name—Sondra Prince—was created by Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent Timothy Sinnigen in a bid to communicate with criminals.

On the page he posted photographs he downloaded from her cell phone, including various poses in which Arquiett was scantily dressed and even pictures of her young son and niece.

Posing as Prince, Sinnigen then used the page "to initiate contacts with dangerous individuals he was investigating with regards to an alleged narcotics distribution ring," [court documents](#) state.

The Facebook page was still online at the beginning of the week, but was deleted after BuzzFeed broke the news.

Arquiett is demanding \$750,000 damages and costs for violation of her constitutional rights, emotional distress and mental anguish.

The trial is scheduled to begin on October 14, 2015, in New York state capital Albany, but a mediator has recently been appointed to reach an out-of-court settlement.

The Justice Department told BuzzFeed that the incident was "under review" but last August the government rejected the allegations despite recognizing that Sinnigen had created the fake page and used photographs from her [cell phone](#) without her explicit approval.

In court documents, the government said the plaintiff relinquished any expectation of privacy she may have had to the photographs when she consented to her phone being searched and all information contained on her phone being used in criminal investigations.

It denied that Arquiett had a First Amendment right to privacy over the photographs and said she cannot prove that Sinnigen acted without "legitimate governmental interests."

The defendant was entitled to qualified immunity, it said.

The young woman, who pleaded guilty to her initial drugs charges, was sentenced to five years probation.

Facebook's community standards ask users to "refrain from publishing the personal information of others without their consent" and prohibit anyone from "claiming to be another person."

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