

Local rapper will stand trial for drug charges

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By William Kenny

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Last week wasn't a good one for aspiring hip-hop star and drug defendant John Wilson, known in the rap community as Tommy Hill.

On Feb. 23, Wilson was ordered to stand trial on a series of drug charges connected to the December raid of the Northeast Philadelphia home of a female friend. Later that day, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Philadelphia filed federal charges against Wilson, who had reportedly refused to cooperate with them on their ongoing investigation into corruption in city government. Wilson, most notably the front man for the North Philadelphia-based rap group RAM Squad, was ordered to appear on March 12 for a Common Pleas Court arraignment. Meanwhile, his arraignment before a U.S. magistrate judge was set for March 11.

The federal affidavit filed last week claims that Wilson, 29, sold about two ounces, specifically 51.8 grams, of crack cocaine to a government informant for \$1,800 cash on Oct. 1. The deal allegedly occurred in the rear parking lot of the Boston Market on Roosevelt Boulevard, at Bustleton Avenue and Levick Street.

FBI agents detained Wilson on Oct. 9 after he allegedly met with the same cooperating witness, who wore a recording device during the earlier deal. While in custody, the suspect allegedly admitted to selling crack, but agents released him, anyway, the court document states. At the time, members of the Philadelphia Police Department's Narcotics Field Unit were also investigating Wilson for similar offenses.

During their eight-month probe, undercover cops allegedly made a series of buys from Wilson at various locations, including a home on the 2100 block of Magee Ave., where authorities believe Wilson was staying.

After allegedly buying between \$15,000 and \$20,000 of crack from Wilson throughout the investigation, police executed a search warrant on the Magee Avenue property and arrested Wilson on Dec. 23. He was alone at the time. His purported live-in girlfriend has not been charged, said Assistant District Attorney Scott Sigman. According to the prosecutor, the last undercover police drug buy occurred at the home one day prior to the raid.

Last week, Wilson was ordered to stand trial on one count each of possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver, possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia and criminal use of a communications facility (that is, using a cell phone to sell drugs).

Together, the charges carry a maximum prison sentence of 17 years in jail. He remained in custody in lieu of \$145,000 bail.

At an earlier hearing, Sigman successfully argued against a reduction in bail by citing the defendant's alleged six aliases, 10 addresses, two dates of birth, 10 prior bench warrants and his "extensive contacts with the law" in New Jersey, Montgomery County and Philadelphia. An article appearing in Sunday's Philadelphia Inquirer linked the new federal charge — specifically, distribution of more than 50 grams of cocaine base — with the defendant's supposed refusal to cooperate with federal agents investigating City Hall corruption. The paper quoted Wilson claiming that the feds asked him to be a cooperating witness at least three times, most recently on Monday morning prior to the preliminary hearing. Wilson refused.

"I'm not a rat," he reportedly said during a jailhouse interview.

Wilson claimed that investigators asked him for information about Shamsud-din Ali, a politically connected Muslim cleric whose businesses and family have been subject to raids, electronic surveillance and other investigative activities by federal agents, the Inquirer said. Wilson reportedly told the paper that his only connection with Ali is his ongoing relationship with the Muslim cleric's daughter, Lakiha "Kiki" Spicer.

Local authorities familiar with the case did not confirm whether or not Spicer is the woman living at the Magee Avenue address. ••

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