

San Francisco Activists Remain Jailed

Protests Held to Demand a Reduction in Million-Dollar Bond

By Michael James

Activists around the United States continue to debate the treatment of two jailed members of San Francisco's AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) as city authorities file more criminal charges and increase the bail against one of the detainees.

ACT UP member David Pasquarelli, who was originally arrested on one count of felony conspiracy, two counts of felony stalking, four counts of felony terrorist threats, three counts of misdemeanor harassment and two counts of violating a restraining order, received an additional four felony and five misdemeanor charges in late December related to threats and harassment against employees and researchers of the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF).

His bail was subsequently raised by \$100,000 to \$600,000.

Pasquarelli, 34, was arrested November 28 along with AIDS activist Michael Petrelis, 42, who is being held on \$500,000 bail.

Petrelis faces one felony count of conspiracy, three counts of felony stalking, four counts of felony terrorist threats and 11 counts of misdemeanor harassment.

"We are talking about terrorism here," said District Attorney Terence Hallinan after the arrests. "These people have terrorized

health department officials ... all kinds of organizations devoted to fighting AIDS have been intimidated for years."

Both men have had visible clashes with public health officials, journalists and AIDS service providers in the past. Their actions have included dumping used kitty litter and feces on the executive director of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF).

Fred Gardner, spokesman for the San Francisco District Attorney's office, argued that the high bail was prompted by the activists' ongoing "degree of danger to the community" as opposed to risk of their fleeing the area.

"Hallinan sought such a high bail because these numerous charges have been continuous over a long period of time and there are many victims involved," Gardner told the Gay.com/PlanetOut.com Network.

Steve Ault, an activist who coordinated the 1979 March on Washington said, "In the context of the current political situation, labeling someone a terrorist for a far less egregious alleged offense will be a standing tactic of repression endangering all who protest."

Ault added that he is not necessarily a supporter of the politics and/or tactics of Petrelis and Pasquarelli.

Gustavo Suarez, spokesman for SFAF, suggested that the use of the word terrorism was not helpful for Hallinan. "But there is no doubt in my mind that these two men have terrorized people in this town who disagree with them," Suarez said.

In an open letter written from jail, the two men stated: "In the climate caused by the tragedies [of September 11], we affirm our commitment to public debate and we defend AIDS dissent. We demand a thorough federal audit of all city AIDS programs..."

Brenda Lein, director of Project Inform's information and advocacy department, recalled participating in a treatment forum in April 2000 that was disrupted by Pasquarelli and other members of ACT UP/San Francisco.

She claimed they threw large pills and spit on people—most of whom were living with HIV/AIDS—and shoved a staff member, who was hospitalized for a knee injury. She added that they screamed, "You faggots deserve to die," to the people who had come to learn about the topic of the forum, structured therapy interruptions.

Lein claims that Pasquarelli has also followed her on the streets near her home and work, yelling lewd comments at her and making threats.

A rally for the men's release was held on January 5 in front of San Francisco's Hall of Justice. A gathering of 15 supporters joined Angela Petrelis and Andrea Pasquarelli, the sisters of the jailed activists.

Both had flown to San Francisco to visit their brothers and show support. Deeply concerned for the health of both men, Angela Petrelis fears a protracted incarceration will result in further deterioration of their conditions. Her brother Michael has plummeting T-Cells and was treated for an advanced stage of thrush only after a judge intervened and ordered immediate medical attention on his behalf.

"Dissent is a vital part of our society's fabric. To label it 'terrorism' is a disgrace," said Angela Petrelis. "David and Michael have always been visible and taken responsibility for their actions. Neither one is a flight risk and they are non-violent men. I am asking that an honest reality check take place

and the bail be reduced immediately to a reasonable figure in keeping with the alleged charges."

The preliminary hearing for the two activists, which began on December 13, will continue on January 23. It was continued do to a previously scheduled vacation of Superior Court Judge Perker Meeks Jr.



Michael Petrelis



David Pasquarelli

**TRANTALIS
LAW OFFICES**

DEAN J. TRANTALIS, ESQ.

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954.566.2226 FAX:954.566.2248

2255 WILTON DRIVE - WILTON MANORS, FL 33305

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Broward/West Palm
 Craig Combs CraigC@ExpressGayNews.com
 Joe Green JGreen@ExpressGayNews.com

Dade
 Kevin Hopper KHopper@ExpressGayNews.com

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954.568.1880
 to speak with one of our account representatives