

"Stop Snitching" Cameraman Gets 30 Years for Drug, Gun Crimes

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A Maryland man who helped make the infamous "Stop Snitching" DVD in Baltimore was sentenced yesterday to 30 years in prison on federal drug and gun charges.

Akiba Matthews, 35, the cameraman for the profane street critique of police informants, **was arrested in November after the police received, of all things, an anonymous tip**, and the U.S. attorney's office said.

The tipster told police that a man was dealing drugs in a Baltimore neighborhood, and the officers who responded spotted someone selling drugs. The man, later identified as Matthews, was taken into custody, and police found a loaded handgun and 58 capsules of heroin in his car, the U.S. attorney's office said.

It was not the first time drug charges had been brought against Matthews, who has four state convictions for drug offenses. In October 2005, a year after the "Stop Snitching" video hit the streets, Matthews was acquitted in Baltimore Circuit County of drug charges. After he was arrested Nov. 15, 2007, Matthews, who is from Baltimore, was charged by the U.S. attorney's office as part of an effort to bring federal charges against felons caught with guns.

The Maryland Exile project was spurred in part by the challenges police have faced in Baltimore and elsewhere in trying to prosecute violent crimes in communities where witnesses are reluctant to come forward, often out of fear of reprisals, distrust of police, or both. Officials credited the project with helping to reduce the homicide rate in Baltimore.

In a jury trial in May in the city's federal courthouse, Matthews was convicted of possession with intent to distribute heroin, possession of a gun during a drug trafficking crime and possession of a gun by a convicted felon.

Federal sentencing guidelines, which are advisory, called for a prison term of between 30 years and life. The prosecutors, assistant U.S. attorneys Jaon M. Weinstein and Stephanie A. Gallagher, said a sentence in that range was appropriate, noting in court papers that Matthews was not only the cameraman in the DVD but also "an active participant both on screen and via his voice, which is heard egging on the various persons who appeared on screen."

"Defense attorney John Bourgeois sought a departure from the guidelines, down to the mandatory minimum 20 years. Judge Catherine C. Blake elected to impose a sentence within the guidelines.

U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosentein said the cooperative effort that followed the release of the DVD had turned the video's message on its head. "The Baltimore 'Stop Snitching' DVD helped produce an unprecedented era of law coordination that has brought a record-breaking reduction in murders," Rosentein said in a statement.

The DVD gained national notoriety, particularly with the brief on-screen appearance of National Basketball Association star Carmelo Anthony, who grew up in Baltimore. In Maryland, it prompted a strengthening of penalties for witness threats and intimidation.