

# St. Petersburg Times

## Activist's fliers run afoul of law at city meeting

[SOUTH PINELLAS Edition]

Copyright Times Publishing Co. Mar 1, 2007

Largo police say the woman got unruly when she was told to stop. Her supporters disagree.

Just one person was arrested during the tense meeting Tuesday that led to the dismissal of City Manager Steve Stanton, who is planning a sex change operation.

But how did a Tampa Bay activist's simple attempt to hand someone a piece of pink paper saying "Don't Discriminate" turn into a felony charge?

Police contend Nadine Smith, executive director of the gay and lesbian advocacy group Equality Florida, became disruptive when they told her stop distributing the fliers in violation of a city ordinance.

"We believe Nadine is completely innocent," said Amy Mandel, chairwoman of the Equality Florida board of directors, who spoke on Smith's behalf Wednesday.

Smith, 41, was released from Pinellas County Jail early Wednesday after posting \$5,250 bail on a felony charge of resisting arrest with violence and a misdemeanor of disturbing others' assembly.

The city assigned extra police and firefighters to the meeting, which drew nearly 500 people. Officers had been instructed to stop the dissemination of fliers because they present a fire hazard and people can slip on them when they end up on the floor, said Largo police spokesman Mac McMullen.

Witnesses and police said Sgt. Butch Ward approached Smith in the lobby and tried to prevent her from handing a flier to Charlie Deppish of Tampa.

Deppish said Smith wanted to know why she could not give him the piece of paper.

"He said, 'I'm not going to argue with you,' " Deppish said. "She said, 'I'm not arguing. I'm just asking, why?' "

Ward tried to escort Smith outside, but she became disruptive, McMullen said.

He said there was "pushing and shoving" and it required four officers to arrest her because she was not complying.

Credit: Times Staff Writer

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