

Pet shop owner facing animal cruelty hires celebrity lawyer

By Alex Wolff

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Photo: Carol Kaliff / Hearst Connecticut Media

IMAGE 1 OF 12

Richard Doyle, right, the pet shop owner accused of animal cruelty and witness tampering, appears in Superior Court in Danbury Wednesday, January 6, 2016, represented by Attorney Jeffrey J. Jowdy.

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DANBURY — A former pet shop owner facing a slew of animal cruelty charges has hired a high-profile legal defense team.

[Richard Doyle](#), 56, is charged with two counts each of animal cruelty, practice of veterinarian medicine without a license, maliciously causing wounds to an animal and witness-tampering. The charges stem from two separate incidents investigated by the [Connecticut Department of Agriculture](#).

Since his first arrest last summer, animal-rights activists have protested outside Danbury Superior Court before many of Doyle's court appearances. Similar protests were staged

outside pet shops he once ran, including one on Federal Road in Danbury and at least two others in New York.

His new attorney, **Joe Tacopina**, has represented a variety of well-known clients involved in high-profile cases. His clients have included baseball star **Alex Rodriguez**, in a civil suit; actor **Lillo Brancato**, who was acquitted of murder charges; and Dutch teen **Joran van der Sloot**, a suspect in the disappearance of **Natalee Holloway** in Aruba.

In court Friday, Tacopina, who replaced **Jeffrey Jowdy** as Doyle's attorney, successfully argued that his partner, **Chad Seigel**, should be allowed to work on the case, despite not being licensed in Connecticut.

As part of his argument, Tacopina cited Seigel's expertise in handling cases likely to be scrutinized by the media.

Speaking to Judge **Richard Marano**, state's attorney **Deborah Mabbett** questioned Tacopina's assertions about the media scrutiny, pointing out that only one reporter was present.

"It's not like Fox or the other news channels are here," Mabbett said.

Tacopina said his team also has experience dealing with protesters. About 10 animal rights activists, whom Mabbett referred to as "concerned citizens," attended the hearing.

Earlier more than 15 protesters, many wearing black shirts saying "Puppies don't belong in mills," had gathered outside the courthouse.

Dyan Pellegrini, a protester from Somers, N.Y., said she bought her Yorkie, Roxy, from Doyle, but the dog was ill from the start. Roxy is now healthy, but she said her experience demonstrates the importance of ensuring that others don't buy from pet stores similar to Doyle's.

"I think it sends a message that a lot of people are seeing the puppy mill side of it," Pellegrini said. "If we don't stand up to it, no one will."

But Tacopina said protests can influence a jury, should the case go to trial.

"These are emotional cases," he added. "In cases where members of the public gather on the date of court, inside the court room and after the court . . . that could tend to have an effect on jurors, which is really not what the court process should be about."

According to court records, Doyle performed illegal surgery on several dogs, including trying to drain a cyst from a St. Bernard puppy's elbow.

Last July, he was accused of illegally performing a surgical procedure on a Neapolitan mastiff's inner eyelid. The dog suffered severe bleeding and was eventually euthanized, officials said.

Doyle's case will resume Sept. 30.

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