

Judge orders police officer to jail

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A decorated Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police officer was booked into jail Wednesday after a judge found him in civil contempt of court.

Superior Court Judge Perry Brannen ordered officer Michael Zaragosa, a walking and bicycle patrol officer on the southside, to spend two days in jail.

Chief Willie Lovett ordered an internal affairs investigation, following department policy.

The contempt order stems from a civil divorce case that Cynthia Zaragosa filed against her husband last year.

In that case, Judge Brannen issued a temporary order preventing either side from selling, disposing of or removing any property belonging to the couple until the case is resolved.

Earlier this month, Cynthia Zaragosa's attorney claimed that Michael Zaragosa brought the couple's three dogs to the Humane Society of Chatham County and had two of them, "Scooby" and "Scrappy," euthanized.

In court documents, attorney Kathleen Aderhold claims Zaragosa told "his daughter and step-daughter that if and when the pets were killed it would be the fault of (Cynthia Zaragosa)."

He has "vilified her in the eyes of her children."

Zaragosa's attorney, Michael

Schiavone, said in an interview that his client, who has primary custody of their child, simply could not afford to take care of the dogs — two pit bulls and a chow mix.

He said Zaragosa offered them to his wife, and she refused to take them. So he took them to the Humane Society, hoping the organization could find them new homes.

But while there, Scooby and Scrappy became aggressive, and the Humane Society put them down.

"To him, the choice was between these animals or the kids," Schiavone said.

Judge Brannen was not swayed, and found Zaragosa in "willful contempt" of his order.

"I was astonished that the court held him in contempt, and I venture to say everybody in that courtroom was taken aback," Schiavone said.

Lovett called Zaragosa a "very good" officer: "Everything I have heard about him has been positive."

Said Police spokesman Sgt. Mike Wilson, "If detectives are looking for someone (on the southside), they will go to him. He knows his beat so well and is able to get information so quickly that he can find the guys most officers have a hard time finding.

"He is the type of officer who takes ownership of his beat to the point where he takes it personally and really tries to bring closure to these cases."