

## NEWS

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# Criminal lawyers question why Toronto colleague was arrested inside courthouse for allegedly bringing in drugs



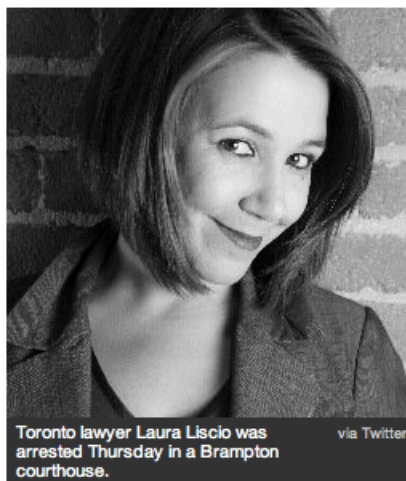
ASHLEY CSANADY | February 13, 2015 | Last Updated: Feb 17 10:17 AM ET  
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The association that represents criminal lawyers is questioning the decision of police on Thursday to arrest a lawyer who was about to enter the courtroom and still wearing her black robes.

Laura Liscio, 32, was arrested at a courthouse in Brampton, north of Toronto, by Peel Regional Police for allegedly bringing drugs into the building. She was escorted in handcuffs, and faces several charges related to drug possession and trafficking.



Toronto lawyer Laura Liscio was arrested Thursday in a Brampton courthouse. via Twitter

“The decision to arrest her wearing her lawyer gowns...is offensive to the whole criminal justice system

Daniel Brown, Toronto director of the Criminal Lawyers' Association, said the arrest was “not something that needs to be done in such a public way.”

“The decision to arrest her wearing her lawyer gowns, I think is really kind of offensive to the whole criminal justice system,” Brown said.

He said Liscio was likely bringing clothes to a client when the substance was found. While not common, he said “it’s something that occasionally happens in the middle of trial,” either because family members can’t get to the facility where the accused is being held, or because the facility isn’t accepting clothes, due to lockdown, job action or other administrative reasons. Several lawyers interviewed for this piece called it an occasional but necessary practice.

“What about the circumstances of her case warranted an exigent arrest like this?” he

wondered. He said she could have been brought down to the station to discuss the issue without requiring such a scene.

Peel Police won't say what drug Liscio is accused of carrying in, but Brown said he has been told it was marijuana. Several people interviewed for this story confirmed that Liscio is accused of knowingly bringing in the drug along with a change of clothes for her client. After the drugs were discovered, she was arrested.

## “She very well may have been a dupe in the process of bringing clothes to her client

“She very well may have been a dupe in the process of bringing clothes to her client,” Brown said. It's not something he's done because he was warned against it years ago “for this very reason.”

Emma Rhodes, a criminal lawyer who works across the hall from Liscio, but in a different firm, called the charges “absurd” and “bulls—.”

She's known Liscio for around eight years and calls her “highly ethical” and “highly responsible.” Rhodes can't discuss the details of the case because she's been in contact with Liscio, who she said is “devastated” and won't be talking to the media.

“The most important thing to her is the fact that she conducts herself in an ethical and honourable way, so to have this happen to her is devastating,” Rhodes said. “She is somebody who, if you called her at 2 a.m., she'd be the first one there.”

She said support from all types of lawyers and from all levels of the justice system has poured in, with many in the profession upset about how Liscio was taken in by police.

“The manner in which she was arrested is just shameful,” Rhodes said.

Peel police spokesperson Sgt. Matt Small said the decision to arrest at the courthouse was “obviously a decision made by the officers that attended” and he “wouldn't be able to speak to the specifics” of that decision.

As for why the police aren't releasing what drug Liscio is charged with possessing, or how much, Sgt. Small said that is a decision made by the investigating officers.

Many police forces across the country release the amount and nature of the substance involved in drug possession charges.

Several lawyers wondered why police bothered putting an officer of the court under arrest, since she was not a flight risk, and to do it so publicly, in front of her clients at a busy time of day in one of the busiest courthouses in the country.

The move has “upset the entire criminal bar,” said Alison Mackay, another criminal lawyer who often works out of the Brampton courthouse in question. She is also the Peel director for the Canadian Lawyers' Association. She's met Liscio in passing but doesn't know her well.

## “Criminal lawyers have united around this... and [are] thinking about ways to have this rectified

She said the busy courthouse often deals with contraband, either with prisoners obtaining it there, or through the many other channels it takes into jails: “having

someone bring in drugs through clothing, now that happens a lot.”

Usually the police speak with the lawyer and deal with the issue as it comes. Mackay said “criminal lawyers have united around this.... and certainly [are] thinking about ways to have this rectified.”

“Perhaps it could have been handled in a more discreet way,” said Mandeep Saggi, another criminal lawyer from the area.

Liscio’s Law Society of Upper Canada [record](#) shows no history of past or current disciplinary action.

“Miss Liscio is an extremely hard working, ethical, brilliant young lawyer,” her lawyer Stephen Bernstein [told](#) the *Toronto Star*, adding they will fight the allegations. “The key issue is she’s charged with something she would or could not do.”

Liscio faces four charges: possession of a controlled substance, possession for the purpose of trafficking, obstructing justice, and breach of trust. Her lawyer has indicated she will fight the case.

She will next appear in court March 12.

The Criminal Lawyers’ Association represents approximately 1,000 members and describes itself as “a voice for criminal justice and civil liberties in Canada.”