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Metro Pickets Planned for Ill Activist Osipova

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Activists will on Tuesday stage protests across Moscow in support of a severely ill opposition activist-turned-housewife who was jailed in Smolensk on questionable drug charges, Radio Liberty said.

Supporters of Taisia Osipova are to hold the single-man pickets by all Moscow's 185 metro stations, the report said. Such pickets are the only form of protest that requires no sanction from authorities.

Osipova was found guilty by a Smolensk district court on Dec. 29 of attempting to sell illegal narcotics and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

The verdict, timed for the holidays when political activity is at a low, was announced in the absence of media representatives, who had been expelled from the courtroom, Kommersant reported, citing witnesses.

Osipova's lawyers said they would appeal the verdict. Her supporters have said the case was created by law enforcement agencies in order to put pressure on Sergei Fomchenkov, Osipova's husband and a member of the radical opposition group The Other Russia.

Osipova, 25, is the mother of 5-year-old daughter and has severe diabetes.

Osipova was arrested last year after several bags of heroin were found in her apartment during a search conducted jointly by officers from a drug-fighting unit and officers from an anti-extremism department. The two divisions rarely cooperate, and their operation sparked allegations that they worked together to plant drugs in the house.

Police officers said they were tipped off about drug trade at Osipova's apartment by two students at a local university. The students were members of Nashi, a pro-Kremlin youth organization, and have reported on students' political activity to police.

The Nashi members and police officers who testified in court presented conflicting accounts of the case, and Osipova's defense lawyers raised doubts about their independence.

Politically active in Smolensk in the early 2000s, Osipova has since kept a low profile, raising her daughter and living separately from Fomchenkov, who was engaged in political activity in Moscow.

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