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U.S. Will Drop Smuggling Charges Against Russian-Born Harvard Medical School Scientist

By Reuters

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Harvard scientist Kseniia Petrova. **REUTERS / Reba Saldanha**

U.S. prosecutors said Tuesday that they will drop criminal charges against a Russian-born scientist at Harvard University accused of smuggling frog embryos into the United States after she argued the Trump administration had singled her out for prosecution.

Federal prosecutors in Boston said in a court filing they were dismissing the charges against Kseniia Petrova after a federal judge cleared the way for her to obtain evidence supporting her claim that she was being vindictively prosecuted.

Prosecutors in the filing said that while they viewed those claims as "meritless," continuing to prosecute the case after the judge's order "would divert significant time and attention from more substantial federal interests."

"Throughout these proceedings, Ms. Petrova has shown tremendous courage, and we are relieved that this chapter of her terrible ordeal will soon be over," William Fick, her lawyer, said in a statement.

A spokesperson for U.S. Attorney Leah Foley, the Trump administration's top federal prosecutor in Massachusetts, declined to comment.

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U.S. immigration authorities took Petrova, a biomedical researcher at Harvard Medical School, into custody at the airport in Boston in February 2025 after her visa was revoked upon her return from a trip to France.

Prosecutors brought a criminal case against Petrova in May 2025, as a federal judge in Vermont weighed ordering her release from the immigration detention facility in Louisiana.

Prosecutors alleged that U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents stopped Petrova after her checked duffel bag was flagged for inspection, revealing the frog embryos that they said should have been declared to customs officials.

Petrova, who was ultimately released on bail in June 2025, pleaded not guilty to the smuggling and false statement charges she faced. She has said her boss asked her to bring back frog embryo samples for experiments.

Her lawyers argued the charges were brought in retaliation for her decision to challenge the immigration proceedings against her and said that the case had been brought amid a broader campaign by the White House against researchers, universities and Harvard itself.

In April, a federal judge in Vermont ruled Petrova's visa had been unlawfully canceled.

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