US transgender activist 'pressured to appear on airport reality TV show'

Monica Jones claims Border Security producers at Sydney airport knew details of her case she had not told them - and when she put stop to filming 'immigration got really strict with me'

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A US transgender activist who had her visa cancelled at Sydney airport claims Seven Network producers knew details of her case that she had not told them, and that they pressured her into agreeing to be filmed for the TV program Border Security.

Monica Jones was voluntarily deported back to the US on Tuesday morning after being detained in Villawood immigration detention centre while trying to re-enter Australia last Friday. She was accused of breaching her visa conditions on an earlier trip to the country.

Jones had her phone and laptop examined by customs officials as she was leaving Australia the previous week with a ticket to return on Friday.

"I think I was there for about 20 to 30 minutes before they said, ‘OK, you’re good to go,’ ” she said. “I left the country, I got on my airplane.”

The trouble started when she tried to scan her passport upon returning to Sydney airport on Friday. Jones said she was told to see a customs official, who ushered her into a small room.

“It was about 30 seconds before the cameras showed up from Channel Seven Border Security and tried to get me on their TV show,” she said.

Border Security is a high-rating, internationally syndicated reality show that follows arrivals at airports around Australia who tangle with customs officials. Signs are posted in terminals when filming is taking place and people are asked to approach a crew member if they do not want to be filmed.

Jones said two producers had been allowed into her interrogation room and tried to persuade her to consent to being filmed for the program.

But she refused, telling the producers: “I see how you guys treat trans women in the media here,” in reference to lurid headlines in Brisbane’s Courier-Mail newspaper that described a murdered Indonesian trans woman as a “ladyboy” and a “she male”.

Jones said the producers tried to convince her to change her mind, saying: “Your case is really interesting, it would make a good story.”

She does not know how the producers knew details of her case. “They knew what was going to happen,” she said. They knew details of what immigration was going to do to me. I think they knew it was great TV, that that could sensationalise my story.”

The African-American activist is involved in a high-profile appeal in Arizona against her conviction in April for the offence of manifesting prostitution.

“When you say you’ve got a very interesting story to a trans woman, I know you’re going to sensationalise my story,” she said.

Jones said she had come to believe that agreeing to appear on the program would help solve her visa issues. “My impression was that everything relied on that interview,” she said. “So I said yeah.”

She was moved to a larger room and filming began, then she had second thoughts. “Once I realised what the interview was about I told them to stop rolling,” she said.

The two producers kept trying to convince her to change her mind but eventually relented, she said. “That’s when immigration got really strict with me,” she said. “They got really blunt.”

Jones was held at Villawood during the weekend and faced court on Monday, where she successfully applied for a judicial review of the decision to cancel her visa. Her legal team plans to subpoena the Seven Network.

The Seven Network and the immigration department have been contacted for comment.

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