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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Malicious Prosecution by Denver Police** Denver man wins case against police officers in forgery case

DENVER, COLO. (MAR. 4, 2022) - A federal district court has awarded Juan Valenzuela \$500,000 in his malicious prosecution case against Denver police officer Karl Coleman (Valenzuela v. Coleman, No. 18-cv-329).

On February 15, 2017, Valenzuela went through a TSA security checkpoint at Denver International Airport. He didn't have a current driver's license but had an expired, albeit damaged, California identification card that he presented to the TSA officer. Even though the anti-tampering portion of the card was intact, and Valenzuela was still able to be identified from it, a supervisor presented it to an onsite Denver Police officer, believing the ID card to be "suspicious." Valenzuela explained that the license had been damaged in the washing machine and offered several other forms of ID, including a photo ID. He even had his prison captain from his job at a correctional facility verify his identity.

Despite all that, additional DPD officers examined the card for less than five minutes, despite having sufficient time and multiple other methods they could have used to verify the card. After one of them expressed that the card "felt to me to be a fraud," Valenzuela was read his rights, charged with felony forgery, and taken to interrogation. Eventually, three officers decided to detain him and he was handcuffed and taken to a holding cell.

One of the officers, Karl Coleman, contacted the National Crime Information Center and learned that Valenzuela did in fact have a valid California driver's license with the same ID number as the damaged card. Unlike many states, California issues a unique number to each individual as opposed to each card. None of the officers have said they were aware of this and thus Valenzuela was arrested for forgery.

Valenzuela ended up spending two days in jail and was charged by the Denver District Attorney, which led to months of stress dealing with the prosecution. Because of the arrest, he was fired from his job as a correctional officer at a Colorado prison, because they can't employ someone facing a felony charge. Four months later, the prosecutors determined the ID was valid and dropped the charges. Valenzuela was later rehired at his job, but suffered both emotionally and financially as he and his family struggled to pay their living expenses during this time.

Valenzuela ended up suing for unlawful arrest and detention, as well as faulty employee training with regards to examining IDs, alleging that the Denver officers violated his Fourth Amendment rights. Attorney Raymond Bryant filed a civil lawsuit on his behalf in U.S. District Court in Denver against Denver police officers Karl Coleman, Ligela Craven, and Anthony Wilkerson. Bryant said that "it should be obvious to any police officer that wear and tear-type damage to an ID card is not an attempt to commit forgery." He then added, "How can any airline passenger feel safe if the Denver police are willing to arrest on such flimsy curiosities?"

A court determined that the officers did not do their due diligence in researching the validity of the ID card, with U.S. District Judge Marcia S. Krieger writing in an opinion, "[T]he record reflects that none of the key officers engaged in the sort of 'digging' that they knew they were supposed to undertake." Before the trial concluded, Judge Krieger retired and Judge Christine Marie Arguello took over. As part of the final ruling, Judge Arguello held as a matter of law that officer Coleman caused the prosecution by submitting a faulty Probable Cause Statement to a criminal court judge to rely upon for the arrest. Valenzuela won the overall case, but his attorney will continue to appeal the unlawful arrest charges that were dismissed by Judge Krieger.