



ACLU Suit Charges Lawrence Police with Inhumane Treatment of Arrestee

Police beat and stripped naked an Essex County resident in jail cell

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 1, 2009

CONTACT:

Howard Friedman, 617-742-4100

Christopher Ott, Communications Manager, 617-482-3170 x322, cott@aclum.org

BOSTON -- Lawrence police officers beat and choked an Essex County resident at the police station after his arrest, then forced him to strip naked and placed him in a small cell with another detainee, according to a civil rights suit filed today by the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts.

The suit seeks damages on behalf of Juan Figueroa against the City of Lawrence and police officers Alberto Inostroza and Thadeus Czarnecki, who arrested Mr. Figueroa in Lawrence on August 13, 2006. With Mr. Figueroa in custody and under control at the police station, the complaint alleges that Mr. Inostroza repeatedly slammed him into the door of the station and punched him several times in the face, giving him a bloody nose. It further alleges that Mr. Czarnecki subsequently grabbed and choked Mr. Figueroa.

The suit also alleges that in order to punish and humiliate Mr. Figueroa, the officers then claimed, without factual basis, that Mr. Figueroa was "suicidal" and, in accordance with official city policy, stripped him, and then locked him in a cell with another detainee who was fully clothed. Later, the two officers allegedly forced Mr. Figueroa's cellmate to strip as well, and locked them together without clothing, blankets, or any other covering.

Figueroa is represented by ACLU of Massachusetts cooperating attorneys Howard Friedman and David Milton, and by ACLU of Massachusetts Legal Director John Reinstein.

"Placing a naked man in a cell with someone fully clothed as a supposed suicide prevention measure is outrageous and unlawful," said Friedman.

The suit seeks damages from the two officers and the city of Lawrence claiming unreasonable use of force, assault and battery, and multiple violations of federal and state civil rights statutes.

"A policy that permits the police to mislabel someone as potentially suicidal and then to mistreat and humiliate the person by placing him naked in a cell with another detainee is both dangerous and inhumane," said Carol Rose, Executive Director of the ACLU of Massachusetts. "There is no scientific or other research that suggests that this practice is useful or appropriate. To the contrary, this case demonstrates that the policy is ripe for abuse by police officers who use it as a pretext to humiliate anyone they arrest, even before the person has had his day in court."

-end-