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Verdicts & Settlements

\$18M Award In False Arrest Case

A California jury on Feb. 15 awarded \$18 million to a teacher who said a sheriff's detective falsely accused him of kidnapping and assaulting a girl and then hid evidence that would have exonerated him.

Plaintiff Raul Ramirez was arrested after a student identified him as the man who kidnapped her at gunpoint in May 2002, drove her to another location and demanded she perform a sex act. The 16-year-old girl escaped.

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A jury found the 29-year-old teacher not guilty after he produced ATM receipts and cell phone records showing he was miles from the scene when the crime occurred. A judge later made the rare finding that he was "factually innocent."

Ramirez then sued the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, alleging that Detective Frank Bravo, a 20-year veteran, built a false case

against him.

According to Ramirez's federal complaint, Bravo knew he did not match the victim's description of her assailant, but withheld that information until just before trial. Ramirez's attorney also said Bravo did not disclose the existence of the girl's backpack, which did not contain Ramirez's fingerprints.

Bravo "arrested Mr. Ramirez and basically shattered his life based on the unreliable eyewitness identification of a teenage girl who was mistaken," said defense attorney Michael Artan. "Then he hid evidence that would have exonerated Mr. Ramirez."

Assistant County Counsel Roger Granbo said the county was disappointed by the verdict, adding sheriff's officials believed they were not liable because prosecutors thought the case against Ramirez had merit.

"The district attorney knew the problems with the case and the positive aspects and made an independent decision to prosecute," Granbo said.