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**Lawsuit Alleges St. Clair County Sheriff's Officers Forced
Innocent Teen to Falsely Confess to Armed Robbery and Spend
Nine Months in Jail**

EAST ST. LOUIS, Ill. – St. Clair County Sheriff's Department officers employed psychologically coercive interrogation tactics to wring a fabricated confession from a 17-year-old boy and keep him in jail for more than nine months before charges were dropped, according to a lawsuit filed Wednesday in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Illinois.

Naming St. Clair County and seven St. Clair County Sheriff's Department officials as defendants, the complaint alleges that the officers used coercive measures to force Trevon Yates to incriminate himself falsely and against his will in violation of his constitutional rights. The lawsuit brings claims of coercive interrogation, false arrest, civil conspiracy, malicious prosecution, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Yates is represented by Locke Bowman and Alexa Van Brunt, attorneys with the Roderick and Solange MacArthur Juvenile Justice Center, and Laura Nirider, an attorney with the Center on Wrongful Convictions of Youth (CWCY). The MacArthur Justice Center and the CWCY are public interest law firms and part of Northwestern University School of Law's Bluhm Legal Clinic in Chicago. Belleville attorney Jim Ellis also represents Yates in the case.

On Aug. 28, 2013, officers arrested Yates and brought him to the St. Clair County Sheriff's Department for questioning in connection with the Aug. 12 armed robbery of a couple who were lured to a parking lot in Belleville, Illinois, where they expected to meet someone advertising an iPhone 5 for sale on the website Craigslist.

Although they had no evidence implicating Trevon Yates in the crime, officers repeatedly told Yates, who has diminished cognitive ability, that they knew he was involved in the robbery and that he could avoid incarceration by confessing, according to the lawsuit.

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“In response to these tactics, Trevon repeatedly sobbed uncontrollably for several minutes at a time, often rocking back and forth, writhing in his seat, sliding from his chair onto the floor, and praying aloud to God,” the suit states. “Thirty-five times, he begged for his mother; and on one occasion, he threatened to kill himself.”

To end the psychologically brutal interrogation, Yates eventually agreed to admit to the crime. But because he was innocent, the defendants had to “repeatedly spoonfeed details about the armed robbery to Yates.” Those details then were incorporated into the confession.

Trevon Yates was charged as an adult with armed robbery while armed with a firearm, a charge carrying a sentence of between 21 and 45 years in prison. He entered a not guilty plea with bond set at \$500,000 and remained in jail for over nine months.

After viewing the videotape of the interrogation, the St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office moved to dismiss all charges against Yates on June 12, 2014. No charges are currently pending, and the armed robbery is believed to remain an open investigation.

In addition to the nine months of deprived liberty, the lawsuit explains, Yates’ reputation has been damaged by publicity surrounding the case. At the time of his arrest, a press release from the St. Clair County Sheriff’s Department resulted in news stories that identified Yates as an accused robber and included a color mugshot. When the charges were dropped, no news release was issued, and there was no media coverage.

In addition to St. Clair County, the defendants named in the lawsuit are St. Clair County Sheriff’s Department Investigators Kenneth McHughes, Frank Bennett, Brian Cregger, Maurice McMiller and Jason Robertson; St. Clair County Sheriff’s Department Lieutenant Scott Weymouth; and St. Clair County Sheriff’s Department Sergeant George Mokriakow.

PDF of the lawsuit is [HERE](#).

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About the Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center

The Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center advocates for human rights and social justice through litigation. As one of the nation’s premier civil rights organizations, the MacArthur Justice Center has played a prominent role in bringing Chicago police misconduct and torture to the public’s attention and has helped wrongfully convicted men and women win multi-million dollar verdicts and settlements as compensation for the time they spent in prison.

For additional information, visit <http://www.law.northwestern.edu/legalclinic/macarthur/>

About the Center on Wrongful Convictions of Youth

Through outreach, advocacy, education, and litigation, the Center on Wrongful Conviction of Youth (CWCY) seeks to implement policies and practices that will ensure that the evidence used against youth is reliable. The CWCY is spearheading national efforts to exonerate wrongfully convicted youth and drive criminal justice reforms that will prevent children from making false and coerced statements during police interrogations.

For additional information, visit <http://www.law.northwestern.edu/legalclinic/wrongfulconvictionsyouth/>