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## **Psychologically Coercive Interrogation by St. Clair County Sheriff's Officers Results in \$900,000 Legal Settlement**

### ***False Confession Wrung from Innocent Teen Victim Kept Youth in Jail for Nine Months***

BELLEVILLE, Ill. – St. Clair County government has agreed to pay \$900,000 in compensation to a youth jailed for nine months after he was forced to confess to an armed robbery he did not commit.

The settlement – believed to be among the highest in the history of the county – was negotiated after the filing of federal lawsuit alleging St. Clair County Sheriff's Department officers employed psychologically coercive interrogation tactics to wring a fabricated confession from Trevon Yates, who was a 17-year-old boy living with his parents in East St. Louis at the time of the 2013 incident. St. Clair officials kept him in jail for more than nine months before charges were dropped.

The video of the 2-hour interrogation shows Yates repeatedly professing his innocence, begging for his mother and praying to God. Although they had no evidence implicating Yates in the crime, officers repeatedly told Yates, who has diminished cognitive ability, that they knew he was involved in the robbery. They implied he could avoid incarceration by confessing.

"What happened to Trevon Yates is appalling," said Locke Bowman, Executive Director of the Roderick and Solange MacArthur Juvenile Justice Center, a non-profit public interest law firm based at Northwestern University School of Law's Bluhm Legal Clinic in Chicago. "In this case, police officers were less interested in solving a crime than they were in charging someone – anyone -- with a crime."

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After receiving a tip that a youth named “Trayvon” had been involved in the armed robbery of a couple lured to a Belleville parking lot to meet someone advertising an iPhone for sale on Craigslist, officers in the St. Clair County Sheriff’s Department picked up Trevon Yates for questioning – even though he didn’t match the physical description offered by the tipster, who soon after told officers Trevon Yates was not involved.

“This jailing and public humiliation happened because county law enforcement officers were indifferent to the facts,” Bowman said. “They needed a suspect to solve a high profile crime. To them, one black boy named Trevon was as good as another, and they did whatever they could to force a confession – a false confession.”

Yates also is represented by Alexa Van Brunt and Sheila A. Bedi, attorneys with the MacArthur Justice Center; Laura Nirider, an attorney with the Center on Wrongful Convictions of Youth at the Bluhm Legal Clinic; and Jim Ellis, an attorney in private practice in Belleville.

“There is no excuse for the coercive interrogation techniques used by county officers sworn to uphold the law,” Nirider said. “The amount of emotional distress intentionally inflicted on this child is shocking. He begged for his mother 35 times, threatened to kill himself and was sent to spend months in jail.

“After repeatedly telling interrogators the truth about his innocence, he finally succumbed to their demands for a confession,” Nirider said. “But because he was innocent and knew nothing of the crime, the officers spoon-fed information to him – words they needed him to say to try to make it look like he had been present at the scene of the crime.

“During intense police interrogations, children are particularly susceptible to pressure to confess to crimes they did not commit,” Nirider added. “When police lie about evidence against the youth being questioned and make an implied promise that incarceration can be avoided through a confession, many youth believe taking responsibility for a crime they didn’t commit is their quickest way out of the police station. For Trevon Yates, the false confession meant more than nine months in jail, living in fear of an even longer prison sentence and a damaged reputation.”

“Based on statements from law enforcement officers, Trevon thought a confession would end the interrogation and that he would be free to go home to his parents,” Ellis said. “Instead, his mugshot was transmitted to area news media with a news release announcing the county had solved the Craigslist armed robbery. Unable to meet bond of \$500,000, Trevon remained in jail for over nine months and faced the prospect of a lengthy prison term. We hope this settlement will help put an end to the use of these kinds of interrogation tactics.”

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The St. Clair County Board approved the settlement on Monday. Although agreeing to the settlement amount, the county denied any wrongdoing. The settlement concludes the lawsuit filed last year in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Illinois. The lawsuit alleged coercive interrogation, false arrest, civil conspiracy, malicious prosecution, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

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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/>