

PRESS RELEASE

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PROTESTERS SUE TO STOP POLICE FROM FIRING PROJECTILES AT DEMONSTRATORS

Four protesters demonstrating against police violence who were seriously injured when shot with projectiles euphemistically called “rubber bullets” have filed a federal class action complaint against the City of Sacramento, Sacramento Police Department, its Police Chief, and the unknown responsible officers. (A copy of the filed class action complaint is attached to this release.) The plaintiffs represent a class of all persons shot by the police and seek to end the use of the projectiles which cause both death and permanent disability and were recently outlawed against demonstrators in Seattle and Portland.

Thongxy Phansopha was delivering food and water to peaceful demonstrators on May 30 when they was struck by at least six projectiles, fired at close range. Three of the bullets hit their face and head causing them to undergo life-saving brain surgeries.

Joshua Ruiz was demonstrating against wanton police violence when, on May 31, near Capitol Avenue and L Street , Sacramento city police officers started indiscriminately firing their weapons into the crowd of protesters. Several projectiles struck Mr. Ruiz and he fell to the ground. While he was writhing in pain on the ground, police continued to fire directly at him, striking him several more times. Mr. Ruiz was admitted to the hospital for numerous and severe injuries caused by his multiple injuries caused by the projectiles fire at him. One of the injuries is a lacerated liver which, had he not received life-saving medical attention immediately, could have been fatal. He remained in the hospital for several days but even now, three weeks later, continues to experience great pain, discomfort and limitations.

Daniel Garza, a law school graduate and National Lawyers Guild Legal Observer who has observed and documents police conduct at demonstrations across the country, was observing Sacramento Police Officers as they hurled flash bang grenades and tear gas canisters at demonstrators as they moved down J street in downtown Sacramento. He was in a parking lot at 20th and J streets, filming the police/demonstrator interaction while officers moved toward the demonstrators and ordered Mr. Garza to get in front of the police lines even though he announced that he was not part of the demonstration. Wearing a fluorescent green hat identifying himself as a legal observer, Mr. Garza was assisting a demonstrator who had been shot in the face when he, himself, was shot in the forehead at point blank range by an officer who targeted his head. Severely injured, Mr. Garza was helped by a medic to a position of presumed safety on a stairway near 21st and J Streets where the medic and a volunteer doctor administered aid and were bandaging his head when officers again opened fire on them as they screamed “medic,

medic.” Mr. Garza, a veteran with 6 years of service in the U.S. Navy, was hospitalized and treated at the V.A. hospital for a head wound and concussion from which he continues to exhibit troubling symptoms of disorientation and memory loss.

Elisabeth Crouchley was demonstrating near 20th and J Streets early on May 31, when police officers started firing on demonstrators. She observed several protesters struck by police fired projectiles. She was 25 feet from officers as she turned to run and was struck in the back six times by officers who clearly targeted her as she fled. She had both hands in the air and was screaming “don’t shoot, don’t shoot” when she was struck by additional rounds in the head and buttocks. She was treated in a hospital emergency room where staples were placed to close the laceration in her scalp.

“This gross use of excessive force against protesters is an escalation of police violence which shows a decision was made at the highest levels to employ dangerous projectiles in an attempt to discourage protesters from exercising their constitutional rights to demonstrate,” said Mark E. Merin, the Sacramento civil rights attorney whose office has filed the federal complaint. “Something’s got to change,” Merin added, “defunding and disbanding the police, which many communities are demanding, would be a good place to start.”

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