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Wrongfully Arrested Commissioner Speaks Out

Tamarac, FL - Speaking my lived experience at our City Commission meeting on September 25th has caused some controversy and the facts have been confused. I want the truth to be clear because the truth is powerful. I was profoundly affected by my wrongful arrest and the fact that nothing was done about it, made it even worse. It was a traumatizing experience that I have played out in my head many times. I had a flashback and a flood of emotions came to me at the meeting and so, I spoke up.

I have had both positive and negative experiences with police officers. I don't believe that all police officers are bad. Back in 2015, I had a negative and traumatizing encounter with one officer. I have been very open about this experience and I have spoken to many people about this because of how impactful it was on my life. And like so many others, in addition to the emotional trauma, I had to deal with the collateral damage of a false arrest. People see a mugshot and they automatically believe that you are a criminal but, I am not a criminal. I am a father, husband, business owner, voter, caring neighbor, and so many other positive things. Therefore, I have to make sure the facts are front and center.

On July 18, 2015, I saw a fight break out between two homeless men. I, along with one other person, went to break up the fight. Before we could get there, one man was hit in the head with a bottle and he fell to the ground bleeding. One man was trying to stop the bleeding and already helping. I took out my phone to record, thinking that if he died at least his family could see that he was cared for in his last moments. Two police officers arrived on the scene. Although people asked them to render aid, they explained why they could not. They both saw me videotaping with my phone and they did not say anything to me. People started asking and yelling a bit, as the man was in pain, for them to call for an ambulance. They informed us that they had already called. Then, a third officer arrived on the scene, Officer Gallardo. When he saw me taping, he singled me out and told me to stop. I asked him why and said that I had a right to video. He then told me that I had to step back to the hedges. I started walking backward towards the hedges, as I did not want to turn my back to him because he was following me. He asked me why I wasn't complying and why I was following him. As I had the camera on him, I said that I am complying and he was the one following me. I then asked why he wasn't asking everyone else to move back and he arrested me. I never interfered with him and I never followed him. I was publicly humiliated, handcuffed, placed in the police car, fingerprinted, booked, and placed in jail. As a result, I have a mugshot all over the internet, as if I am a criminal. The State declined to file the charges on August 6, 2015 because my lawyer shared the video and it proved that the statements made in the police report were untrue. As reported by CBS4 Miami who reviewed the State Attorney documents,

Broward prosecutors dropped the case after they viewed Gelin's cellphone video of the encounter saying "it has been determined a strong likelihood of conviction is not present as images in the video do not support conviction. A closeout memo from prosecutors said the comments that Gelin was said in the report to have made "were not observed to have been made by either party."

Like so many others who have reached out to me, I was wrongfully arrested.

I filed a formal complaint to Internal Affairs, spoke to the County Sheriff in 2015, the Captain in my town, the current Sheriff earlier this year, and others about my wrongful arrest. Nothing happened to the officer. After the recent Commission meeting, our current County Sheriff wanted to meet with me. I was very honest about what happened to me and how I felt. He made an offer for us to work constructively together to bring about positive change and I will do that because I am about action. I don't want anyone to go through what I went through or worse.

Many untrue, ugly and negative statements have been made about me and even my 5 year old son on social media, but I am grateful to those who have offered support and even the people, from all over the country, who have

challenged what I did but were open to healthy dialog and listened to my point of view. I shared with them my story and the stories of others who were falsely arrested too.

I look forward to working with anyone who wants to ensure justice is a reality for everyone in America.